

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, SAME PROBLEMS:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES MAJORS

By

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## ABSTRACT

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Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS) exist in a space between disciplinary silos. They are housed in variety of ways that sometimes mirror disciplinary departments. Despite their unique position at universities, IDS are susceptible to the same pressures from within and without the university as traditional disciplinary departments. This dissertation examines how IDS respond to these pressures and how their unique contexts influence those responses (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). A study of organizational change, this dissertation focuses on key moments of change in IDS. These moments include: a change to a new director, institution-wide budget cuts related financial instability, creation of new IDS, and a recently completed program review. Four IDS from West Coast R1, M1, and M2 universities were interviewed. Three findings emerged from qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2015): rigor means a variety of things on each campus but is rarely formally assessed; IDS rely on other departments to provide a significant amount of their coursework but relationships with these disciplinary majors vary; the culture IDS creates for its adjunct labor speaks to how the program is administered and how the program and adjunct faculty are invested in each other. Each of these findings points to various ways IDS create sustainable academic environments between disciplinary silos.

This dissertation is dedicated to my Dad  
who taught me to use my education to repair the world.

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

IDS	Interdisciplinary Studies Major(s)
CCS	Comparative Case Study
ESU	Eastern State University
STS	Science, Technology, and Society
DCP	Degree Completion Program
PEPL	Politics, Economics, Policy, and Law



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Interdisciplinary is a notorious buzzword. It is often used as a call for breaking down barriers and working across traditional disciplinary silos. Within the world of undergraduate education, Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS) have similar calls to action. They offer an undergraduate education that looks at how multiple disciplinary lenses provide insight into specific questions as well as broader wicked problems. As IDS stand between disciplinary silos, it is unique in its position that does not mirror that of a traditional disciplinary department. This positionality allows for unique insight into the organizational structure and change of these departments when faced with the same stressors as disciplinary departments. This dissertation investigates: (1) how IDS change in response to internal and external pressures from the university? And (2) how are these changes influenced by their non-traditional positionality? This dissertation provides insights for other programs that find themselves in similar non-traditional positions but still functioning within the larger structures and pressures of a university (i.e.; Offices of Inclusion, online degree programs, and Offices of Student Success).

## **Literature Review**

Interdisciplinary Studies Majors exist within a complex system of higher education and interact with a society with broad expectations of the role of higher education. In this section, I discuss how Interdisciplinary Studies Majors fit within the broader literature on higher education scholarship. To start, the social context of universities highlights the value placed on education. The intrinsic versus extrinsic value of a college education plays a role in how universities as well as society at large views Interdisciplinary Studies Majors.

## **Social Context of Universities**

Universities do not exist within a vacuum. Rather they confer degrees with value in the larger society (Cebula and Lopes, 1982). These degrees have an extrinsic value assigned to them by society and students. However, universities seek to offer degrees and majors to students that have intrinsic value, where the experiences associated with the degree are inherently meaningful to the student and not simply a means towards an end (Cunseo, 2005).

Part of the extrinsic value of a university degree is its ability to produce human capital. While human capital in relation to future employment is not the only reason to pursue a particular academic path, it does provide a direction for students to pursue if they are concerned about future employability (Cebula and Lopes, 1982). Programs of high intellectual quality teach both the content of their field, skills associated with the field, and the value of those combined aspects to the world outside of academia. Students who come from high quality intellectual programs are capable of explaining the value of their program to themselves as well as to their future endeavors (Galotti, 1999).

Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS) are part of this discussion about walking the line between intrinsic and extrinsic value. IDS argue providing academic and personal value to students is not enough: they must teach their students how to explain the value of an IDS degree (Haynes and Leonard, 2010). Part of this conversation is about skill developed in IDS and how those are often skills employers look for in new employees (Jacobs, 1989). An example of this is the T-Model Professional exalted by Michigan State University as the way to prepare students for future employment (Gardner and Estray, 2017). Advocates claim that IDS develop skills employers cite as necessary for new undergraduates: critical thinking (Astin, 1992; Buchbinder, Alt, Eskow, Forbes, Hester, & Struck, 2005; Nowacek, 2005; Vess, 2001), meta-cognitive

reflection (Wolfe & Haynes, 2003); problem-solving and analysis (Buchbinder et al., 2005), self-direction (Barnett & Brown, 1981; Buchbinder et al., 2005), as well as synthetic and other higher order thinking skills (Brown Leonard, 2007; Boix Mansilla, Miller, & Gardner, 2000; Lattuca et al., 2004); advocates cite IDS majors as a successful means of developing these skills (Hursh et al., 1983; Newell 1990; Newell and Green 1982).

### **Sociocultural Context**

Universities, colleges, and academic programs are embedded in a sociocultural context. While the entire United States has a culture around college going and what is considered a meaningful college education (Cebula & Lopes, 1982). Additionally, individual universities and colleges function within a context that is unique to their institution type, location, mission statements, etc. (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Additionally, these institutions exist within a particular temporal context. This historical nature these contexts play a role in understanding the needs and desires of universities and students in the process. The historical situated nature of the sociocultural context included influences on the institution that originate inside and outside the institution. These influences will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

### **Educational Environments**

The Educational Environment refers to the college and/or university that houses the Interdisciplinary Studies Major (IDS). This term refers to both as IDS are housed in a variety of governance structures (Klein, 1990): sometimes they are housed within a college that exists within a broader university structure, sometimes exist without a broader home and exist as a university level project. It is important to understand the ways this variance in governance may affect IDS when discussing influences on the Educational Environment. Part of understanding this educational environment is how IDS is embedded in disciplinary organizational structures,

or attempts to be embedded. IDS that are housed within a college and do not exist as university level projects are protected more like disciplinary majors as their governance structures are more similar.

### **Interdisciplinary Studies Majors**

Interdisciplinary Studies Majors are degree granting programs that teach the skills associated with interdisciplinary inquiry. These programs are at once interdisciplinary in nature and explicitly teach interdisciplinarity. While there are multiple definitions of interdisciplinarity most programs agree with this definition:

A process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession... [It] draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective. (Klein and Newell, 1998, p. 393-4)

Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS) cite this definition and ones similar to it to define the starting point of their programs. IDS vary in how they teach interdisciplinarity and how they design their academic requirements. There are multiple ways to categorize these programs (Klein, 1990). One of the many ways to categorize programs as “tracked” or “individualized” (Rittel and Webber, 1973). This distinguishes between how much IDS is directed by student choice and how much of the program is prescribed.

Another key distinction between types of programs is their interdisciplinary strengths (Klein, 2009). The key elements of a strong interdisciplinary program are: institutionalization, critical mass, and program review. Institutionalization refers to how IDS majors perform as a discipline so they are “systems of power with control over resources, identities, and patterns of research and education” (Klein, 2009, p.100). Critical mass draws from the concept in physics

and argues that the national strength of interdisciplinarity is a factor in strengthening local IDS. Local IDS gain strength by participating in research and teaching networks that establish national infrastructure and a shared epistemology. Finally, program review ensures progress towards “clear and agreed-on goals” (Klein, 2009). While interdisciplinarity may take many forms on a single campus (Amey and Brown, 2006), Klein argued for a unified set of principles that can be applied to IDS regardless of their curriculum or organization. At the heart of IDS program review are measures of: interdisciplinarity; antecedent conditions of critical mass and programmatic strength (such as institutional support and the breadth of disciplines); benchmarking; balance (striking a balance of generic competencies, discipline specific content, and interdisciplinary specific content); partnerships that extend on and off campus.

Alternatively, Augsburg and Henry discuss interdisciplinary strength through the lens of higher education politics (Augsburg and Henry, 2009). Their discussion follows both successful interdisciplinary programs as well as those that have folded. They conclude there are seven ways to develop strong IDS majors. The first is to integrate IDS activities with more traditional disciplines. The need to work with and like traditional disciplines is an ongoing theme in Augsburg, Henry, and Klein’s recommendations for strong interdisciplinarity. Augsburg and Henry further cite the importance of working regularly with specialized researchers. This refers to working with disciplined researchers as well as interdisciplinary researchers. Creating interdisciplinary research teams across campus is one way to integrate IDS into the broader disciplinary culture. The third means to develop strong interdisciplinarity is to be seen as essential to the university without being seen as a threat. In the political realm, this is particularly important to positioning IDS as fulfilling key roles that are integral to the mission of the university. It is also important to accomplish this without threatening other programs’ sense that

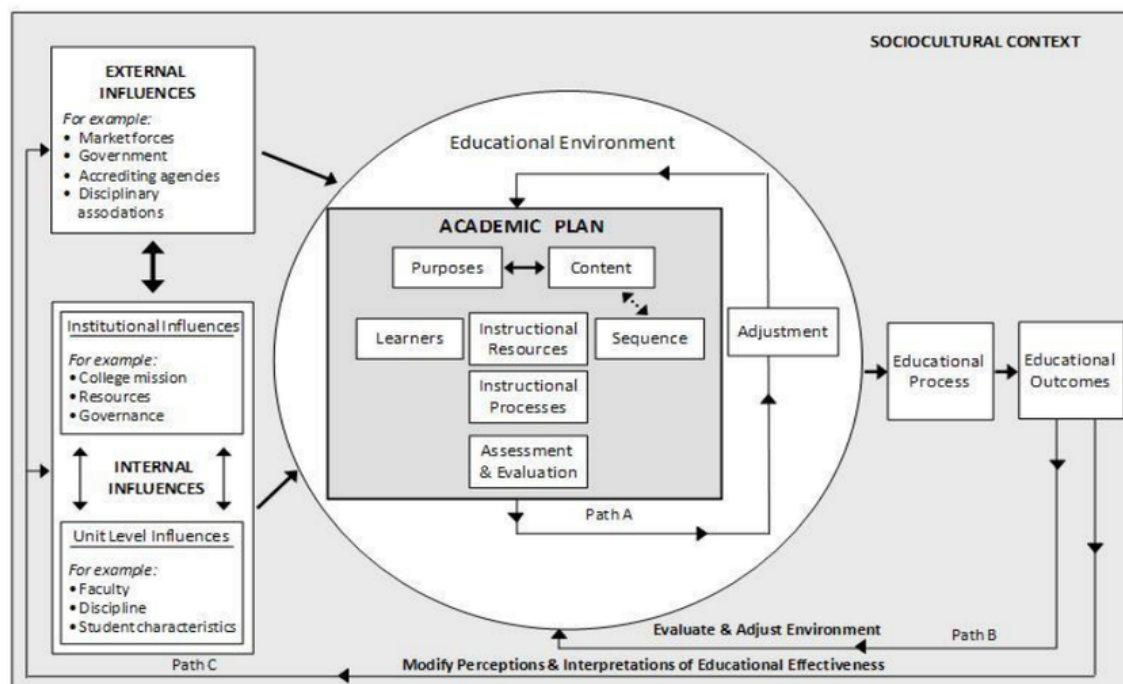
they fulfill these missions. Augsburg and Henry then highlight the importance of continued experimentation in interdisciplinarity. Through their examples of successful and unsuccessful programs, they point to the need for constant innovation and developing new ways of teaching and being interdisciplinary. With regard to governance, strong interdisciplinary programs employ broad-based governance structures. This includes participating in campus-wide interdisciplinary councils to integrate the program into broader governance structures at universities. It also includes creating IDS governance structures that mirror those of traditional majors at the university. The sixth means to develop strong IDS is by stressing skill development. Within the discussion of interdisciplinary skills as a means of developing employable skills, it follows that a program that focuses on developing these kinds of skills is stronger than one that does not explicitly stress skill development. The final means to develop strong interdisciplinary programs is by simply asking for what your program wants and needs to be a strong program. This is particularly salient when discussing faculty lines. Faculty lines seated within the major have been cited as key ways of building strength in interdisciplinary programs (Goldsmith, 2009). Therefore, making strong arguments for faculty lines to administrators is a key part of building a strong program. As Augsburg and Henry stress: “you go not get faculty lines devoted in whole or in part to interdisciplinarity unless you ask for them” (Augsburg et. al., 2009).

### **Conceptual Framework: Academic Plan Model**

Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS) exist within social contexts of a university as well as a social context external to the university. To account for the world of the university as well as the world outside of any particular university, both inside and outside of academia, in change processes in IDS, I employ the Academic Plan Model by Lattuca and Stark (2009) (Figure 1). Given these considerations it is important to employ a theoretical model that accounts for the

variety of intermingled contexts. This model provides theoretical explanation for how academic programs fit within larger contexts of the university and society. The Academic Plan Model “promotes consideration of factors that influence curricular decisions at the course, program, and institutional level” (p.6). The Academic Plan Model developed out of a need to understand the development of the larger curriculum. Specifically, how both the content and context play a role in what and how students learn in higher education. The Academic Plan Model walks through the individual elements of a particular academic plan (in this case the Academic Plan refers to the Interdisciplinary Studies Major), the environment in which the academic plan is placed, and then the forces from the sociocultural environment at play that shape the educational environment. The overarching foregrounding of context and influences on the academic environment are the reason for employing the Academic Plan Model as my conceptual model.

Figure 1. Academic Plan Model (Lattuca and Stark, 2009)



## **Academic Plan**

In this dissertation, the Academic Plan is Interdisciplinary Studies Majors. Not all of the majors collectively, but rather individual IDS at individual universities. I do not want to clump all of these majors together because the individual contexts are key to applying the Academic Plan Model to studying IDS. The consideration of context in applying the Academic Plan Model attends to the role of Sociocultural Context, the Educational Environment, as well as influences on the Educational Environment.

Within this Academic Plan Model, the Academic Plan includes the purposes, subject content and sequencing of the content, as well as the learners, instructional resources, instructional processes, and assessment and evaluation. The Academic Plan is not simply the courses students take to become an IDS, it includes all of the administrative and faculty work necessary to develop, implement, and sustain an academic major. This is why the Academic Plan includes support systems as well as processes developed to support the Academic Plan. It also includes the students themselves. Students are considered internal to the Academic Plan.

## **Contextual Influences**

Contextual influences can be divided between external influences and internal influences. The key differentiation between the two is if the influences exist entirely outside the individual Educational Environment. Once internal influences are differentiated from external influences, internal influences can be divided between institutional influences and unit level influences. With these divisions, it is important to state that external influences will impact internal influences, and internal influences will affect how external influences are experienced within the Educational Environment.



### **External Influences.**

External influences refer to all influences on the Educational Environment that originate outside of the Educational Environment. Lattuca and Stark include in their list of external influences: “market forces, societal trends, government policies and actions, and disciplinary associations that exist outside colleges and universities” (2009, P.12). These forces originate outside of the Educational Environment; however, they apply to the university differently. We can think of market forces, social trends, and government policies and actions related to broader more public parts of the university. One example is policies and trends related to admission to state universities such as Promise Programs. Alternatively, disciplinary associations have more of an effect on the Academic Plan in how we have conceptualized it for this dissertation. For example, disciplinary associations and their connections to publications affect publishing faculty in IDS. Additionally, there are several interdisciplinary associations that function as traditional disciplinary associations by providing guidelines for tenure and promotion; connections to consultants on external reviews; directories and Listservs; job postings; peer reviewed syllabi; and multiple avenues for publication (Association for Interdisciplinary Studies website).

External influences may also take the form of external groups. These groups may be represented in multiple ways, such as employers in the sociocultural context. Employers of new college graduates may be vocal about what they are looking for in new hires (Peter & Hart Research/AACU, 2007). Some university may develop initiatives related to these forces. One example is the push to create T-Shaped Professionals at Michigan State University (Lucas, 2015). Another example of an external groups is equally as vague as “employers” but rather than grouping people to how they relate to students, this group is created out of people with shared advocacy goals. Advocacy groups are another external groups that apply pressure to the

Educational Environment. These advocacy groups may champion a variety of goals such as: internationalization, civic engagement, or interdisciplinarity.

External groups are a perfect example of how external influences can trickle down into internal influences. The source of the pressure may be external to the educational environment, but the pressures can be seen with policies originating from the university and applied to the Academic Plan (IDS Major). Additionally, the advocacy group may technically be external to the university, but a member of the group may champion the cause from within the university and create pressure originating from within the university.

### **Internal Influences.**

Lattuca and Stark differentiate two kinds of internal influences: Those at the institutional level and those at the unit level. These two kinds of internal influences are related to and influence each other in the same ways that the various kinds of external influences are related to each other and affect internal influences.

Institutional Level Influences refers to the variety of ways that the institution can provide or remove support from an Academic Plan. Lattuca and Stark discuss these institutional level influences within the understanding of the Academic Plan Model applying to traditional disciplinary majors. Institutional level influences include “college mission, financial resources, and governance arrangements” (Lattuca and Stark, 2009, p.13). The assumption is the Academic Plan exists within an institution and is therefore supported by organizational infrastructure. This does not necessarily apply to all IDS who may find themselves outside of traditional organizational infrastructure. This is one reason why Interdisciplinary scholars argue that IDS should find homes in traditional organizational infrastructure (Klein, 1990; Augsburg and Henry, 2009). It follows that support for a particular Academic Plan, in this case IDS, and varies by the

centrality of the program to the college or university mission. This may pressure IDS to align themselves explicitly with the Educational Environment's mission statement to become more central to the Educational Environment's identity. The institutional level influences and associated resources can include resource availability, advising systems, and opportunity for faculty development and renewal. These resources can be used as a carrot to draw Academic Plans to model themselves a particular way in exchange for resources.

Unit Level Influences apply more to the nuts and bolts of an Academic Plan. It refers to the influences that “may not directly affect the selection and sequencing of the content and the choice of instructional processes;” but rather refers to “instructors backgrounds, educational beliefs, and disciplinary training [...] and student characteristics” (Lattuca and Stark, 2009, p.14). These are the things that influence how the Academic Plan is developed in non-obvious ways by people's biases and preferences. Lattuca and Stark clarify that “unit level influences vary in salience and intensity at various levels of curriculum development and in different kinds of institutions” (2009, p.14).

The Academic Plan Model highlights the variety of influences at play at any given level of an Educational Environment. It therefore highlights the various contexts Academic Plans find themselves and how each context has varying influences on the Plan. Lattuca and Stark highlight this concept by concluding that the Academic Plan “results from a complicated process embedded in a larger, complex, and somewhat unpredictable set of contexts” (2009, p.14). This embedded nature that highlights the importance of context is why the Academic Plan Model is an ideal conceptual model for this dissertation as it accounts for the variety of contexts in which IDS find themselves.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology and Approach**

I employed a comparative case study approach to case study methodology to examine organizational change in Interdisciplinary Studies Majors (IDS). This section introduces case study and Comparative Case Study (CCS) proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus as a specific approach to multiple-case study (2016). This will be followed by a discussion of the benefits of employing a case study methodology for this dissertation including the ability to choose cases within cases. This section will conclude with a discussion of the shortcoming associated with case study and how CCS addresses these shortcomings. The end of this chapter will introduce key themes developed in CCS analysis.

Until recently there has been debate over what constitutes a case and therefore case study. This debate can be seen with ongoing research into defining and establishing case study across disciplines (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). In these discussions, several small differences are debated, but these discussions agree that case study is the study of a thing that exists within a context and is bounded in some way. Where the discussion varies is in what can be the “thing” and how is it bounded with regard to context. Sometimes the “thing” is described as a phenomenon (Yin, 2002; Merriam, 1998), while other times the thing is a system (Stake, 1995). Additionally, there are varying distinctions made between the “thing” and the context. Yin, Stake, and Merriam all talk about the case being bounded within a context, with clear distinctions made between the context and the “bounded phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p.xiii). Bartlett and Vavrus (2013) hone in on the idea of context and clarify that context is not just physical, but “constituted by social interactions, political processes, and economic developments across scales and across time” (p.16).

Traditional forms of case study have focused on the case itself, while using context as a means to choose a case. The context is then something that the case is bounded within, but does not interact with the case. This approach to case study focuses on the case as an entity.

Comparative Case Study (CCS) has a process-based approach that looks at how and why phenomena take place (Maxwell, 2013). This approach not only considers the physical context of cases, but also their position in real world situations, rather than a lab. It also attends to power relations within the case and broader context. This is achieved by including a historical lens that locates sites within ongoing social relations rather than “primordial places” (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2013, p.13). Additionally, CCS highlights how cases can be compared vertically, horizontally, and transversally. This allows the researcher to examine how actions at different scales influence one another (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2013). Bartlett and Vavrus argue for this conflation of case and context by explaining “context is not a primordial or autonomous place, it is constituted by social interactions, political processes, and economic developments across scales and across time” (2013, p.15).

### **Comparative Case Study**

Comparative Case Study (CCS) is an appropriate choice for this dissertation. This appropriateness can be divided into two arenas: the role of context and the ability to compare cases in three different ways. The contexts of IDS are highly contested arenas where historical alliances sway under economic threats (Augsburg and Henry, 2009). These contexts are key in understanding the cases themselves as well as how cases relate to one another. This comparison of case studies takes a different perspective than represented by more traditional model that recommend within-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis that conceptualizes data across cases to result in an integrated framework (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

CCS conceptualizes comparisons of cases on three axes: horizontal, vertical, and transversal. Horizontal comparison refers to the study of how similar policies unfold in distinct locations and are socially produced and complexly connected. In this dissertation, horizontal comparison is used to assess how and why IDS employed similar policies across locations and contexts.

Vertical comparison pays simultaneous attention to and across scales. Bartlett and Vavrus describe this in terms of how actors respond to both state and federal policies. Even though policies are of the same culture, as the policies are sourced at different levels of government, there are of difference scales and scopes. The authors offer further explanation through policy analysis where key to vertical comparison is “tracing the processes by which actors and actants come into relationship with one another and form non-permanent assemblages aimed at producing, implementing, resisting, and appropriating policy to achieve particular aims” (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p.76). CCS explores how temporary alliances are formed to achieve a goal and are then dissolved. Additionally, vertical analysis allows for comparisons of how individuals interact with policies with regard to differing histories and politics of a particular context. Vertical comparison is appropriate for this dissertation as it necessitates the comparison of local and nonlocal influences on IDS. This is of particular interest for this dissertation as many of the programs included in the study share nonlocal influences, which are common across multiple university settings.

Transversal Comparisons connect the horizontal elements to one another and to the vertical scales to study across and through a phenomenon (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p.93). This often takes the form at looking at the phenomenon overtime. This is based on the assumption that social phenomena have historical roots and “time and space are closely connected” (Bartlett and

Vavrus, 2016, p.93). This kind of analysis creates opportunity to “contrast how things have changed over time and consider what has remained the same in one locale or across much broader scales” (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p.93). IDS majors have a shared history (Klein, 1990) in the development of academia, and have experiences similar contemporary shifts in policy despite occurring in different moments in time (Augsburg and Henry, 2009). While not explored at length in this dissertation, some attention is paid to historical roots of organizational change at participating universities.

### **Shortcomings of Comparative Case Study.**

Bartlett and Vavrus made compelling arguments for CCS. However, the methods associated with this methodology are the same as more traditional forms of case study and multiple-case study. While this section cites Bartlett and Vavrus extensively, the methods section of this proposal cites more traditional proponents of case study methodology. This is not just because they provide the best descriptions of the methods I employed, but also because they are the authors Bartlett and Vavrus cite when describing appropriate methods.

### **Research Site Choice.**

Ragin describes cases not in terms of the question “What is a case?” but rather the question “What is this a case of?” (1992, p.6). This dissertation looks at questions of organizational change in IDS. Therefore, it seeks to answer these questions by looking at “cases of IDS organizational change.” Cases for this study were assembled representing a variety of historical, physical, political, and social contexts. Here it is important to distinguish between the place of a case from the context of a case in that the place is the “site” and therefore one aspect of context. The two should not be conflated:

Comparative case studies resist the holism of many traditional case studies, which stubbornly refuse to distinguish phenomenon from context, often defined implicitly as place. It is essential to divorce the phenomenon of interest from the context in order to gain analysis purchase. (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p.39)

Research sites reflect a variety of contexts that allow for analysis along the three CCS axes.

### **Sample**

To understand the sources of stress on IDS and where power lies, it is important to examine multiple sites to compare how various contexts explain organizational change. Multiple sites highlight how participants understand and construct meaning of their contexts and their particular cases. Part of this construction is an understanding who holds power in administrative and academic changes, and how those imbalances of power play out in organizational change and policy creation and implementation. This section discusses the research sites and the variety of context they represent. How data from multiple sites will be analyzed is discussed in a future section.

The dissertation was conducted at 4 universities and colleges. Individual programs are the “cases” in the case study. I therefore refer to cases and research sites interchangeably. These sites range from R1 to M2 institutions. Each institution is described below, including a rationale for their inclusion. For a university or college to be included in the dissertation they fulfilled six inclusion requirements. These inclusion rules were established to ensure included programs focused on interdisciplinary learning, research, and scholarship and were not programs that used the term “interdisciplinary” to generate interest. First, the programs are housed in a not-for-profit institution. Second, the programs are housed in a 4-year university or college. Community or Junior colleges were not considered. Third, the programs are at least hybrid programs where



some classes are required to be in person. While online programs are not inherently less scholarly, there needed to be a firm line in programs considered for inclusion. Fourth, the programs self-identify in writing as “interdisciplinary.” Programs that identified as “multidisciplinary” or “transdisciplinary” were not included. Fifth, teacher preparation programs were not included. Many Interdisciplinary Studies Majors offer the opportunity to follow a “Teacher Prep Track.” These programs are acceptable, but programs that are exclusively teacher preparatory were not included. None of the institutions in this dissertation fell in this category. Finally, programs that primarily claim to be a broad liberal arts education are not included. In line with identifying as “interdisciplinary,” the goals of the major cannot be to provide students with a broad range of disciplinary experiences through courses such as “Great Books” courses. Programs need to be explicitly interdisciplinary, not vaguely multidisciplinary based on a combination of courses taught simultaneously.

Beyond these initial inclusion requirements, there were a few more considerations made when selecting research sites. The context of each research site was particularly important when considering the “case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Merriam, 1998, p.27). Because of explicit importance and focus on context, care was taken to consider the context of each case. While geography was not included in the consideration of context, a variety of other factors such as institution type and the size of the institution were considered. Additionally, consideration was taken to include IDS that were in various points in their lifecycle: those that were experiencing growth and success; those that identify a state of decline; and those that identify as stable. Identifying programs in in these three positions was accomplished in off-the-record introductory interviews with program directors.

## **Eastern State University**

Eastern State University (ESU) is a large West Coast R1 University. ESU currently has 31,348 undergraduates and 11,856 graduates enrolled (Fall 2019). 53% of these undergraduates are women, and approximately 88% of undergraduates are domestic students, with the majority claiming in-state residency. 24% of the undergraduates identify themselves as White. This major is housed in a Social Science and Humanities College with an undergraduate enrollment of 21,665 students (Spring 2019). The college offers 86 Bachelors degree programs with an average lower division class size of 39 students, an average upper division class size of 31 students.

ESU was recently cited as the best undergraduate program that lets you design your own major (<https://www.collegechoice.net/best-bachelors-programs-design-your-own-major/>). This comes after a significant curricular redesign under a new director. Six years ago the program was getting ready to hire a new director, and the two final candidates were both interested in an extensive curricular redesign and commissioned research on the best practices of IDS. When the current director took office, he wanted to emphasize student research and rigorous writing requirements. I worked for this program as the researcher assigned to compiling best practices, but was not in contact with the program since the new Director took over. ESU is included in the dissertation because it allows me to look at a program that has turned around its image and become well respected. Before this shift, the program was known simply because it was at ESU, but details about the program were not well known.

## **Mission University**

The next participating university is also a large West Coast R1 institution. This university is referred to as “Mission University.” Mission University currently enrolls 23,070 undergraduates and 2,906 graduate students (2018-2019). 54% of the undergraduates are women,

12% of the undergraduates are international students, 85% of the domestic students are in-state residents. Of the domestic student body, 36% of students identify as White, the next largest ethnicity is 30% of students who identify as Chicano/Latino. Mission University uses Classification of Instructional programs from the U.S. Department of Education to classify their student enrollment. Within this framework, the majority of students are declared Physical and Biological Sciences (45%) with the next largest group in Social and Cultural Studies (32%). 8% of the student body is declared in Interdisciplinary/Undeclared.

Mission University is one of the few universities that fit the inclusion criteria and expressly included information about their interdisciplinary programming in their enrollment statistics. This unique focus on interdisciplinary programming was notable when compared to other universities' enrollment information. The IDS at MU is housed in the College of Letters and Science. This is the largest of MU's colleges and is advertised as the home of innovative programs on campus. The enrollment information is misleading as the IDS itself is housed in an advising office and serves few students every year.

## **Greendale**

The third participating university is a small, primarily nonresidential West Coast Master's College and University – Medium program (M2). This university is referred to as “Greendale.” Greendale received an undergraduate instructional classification of professional focus, with some graduate coexistence. It currently enrolls 1,173 students (undergraduate and graduate Fall 2018). Greendale is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with 29% of the population identifying as Hispanic/Latino. 33% of the population identifies as White and 51% of the population is female. The university is divided into four schools with 22 programs of study. The average class size is 15 students and 85% of students receive some form of financial aid.

Greendale is the only nonresidential university in the study. The commuter aspect provides a different perspective from the other universities as it breaks away from the traditional liberal arts concept of the “college experience” but represents a growing population of contemporary college students (Complete College America, 2011). This commuter identity fits in the schools history of development out of a business college. It was established primarily as a professional school and only established a liberal arts curriculum later in its development. Despite the university’s history and current identity as a predominantly professional school, it does attempt to push interdisciplinary work to the forefront of its liberal arts curriculum. For several years, the College of Liberal Arts was called the College of Transdisciplinarity. There was previously an institute of transdisciplinarity on campus but with the promotion of an administrator to Dean came the shift to name the college after its transdisciplinary aspirations. These aspirations faced challenges from the campus community because of a lack of understanding of the term “transdisciplinarity” as well as the connection between transdisciplinarity and the proposed model of general education. Greendale has been explicit about its goals to break down disciplinary boundaries to better serve a largely professionally focused student body. However, it has been received with mixed reviews.

### **Fernham College**

The final participating university is a four-year, small, highly residential private Master’s College and University – Larger Program (M1) on the West Coast. This college is referred to as “Fernham College.” Fernham restricts its undergraduates to women (explicitly all those who currently identify as women or were born female). It enrolls a total of 1,122 students, 713 of them as undergraduates (2019-2020). In 2014 Fernham was identified as a four-year, full-time, more selective, higher transfer-in institution (Carnegie classifications). This indicates that at least

20% of entering undergraduates are transfer students. The university identifies 18% of its undergraduate students as 23 years of age or older (2019-2020). To address this population, the college has a bachelor's completion program. Of the undergraduate student body, 36% identify as White with the next largest group of students identifying as Hispanic/Latinx (32%).

Fernham is included in this study because of its large transfer population and this population's explicit connection to IDS. When Fernham was first contacted about participating in the dissertation, the Associate Provost of Curricular Development responded saying that she was not sure if the program was a fit for the dissertation because the major did not officially exist yet and was still being developed, hopefully achieving approval in Fall of 2018. The Associate Provost cited the need for a degree completion program for the larger community that creates a bachelor program for students with "some college" but who cannot enroll in a traditional four-year university. Fernham was included in the program because it was relatively early in the development of the academic major and faculty were still deciding what the format of the curriculum.

All of these institutions verbally agreed to participate in the dissertation. Directors of existing programs, Deans, and Associate Provosts agreed to interviews and to connect me to faculty and staffed involved in the majors. I received consent from all of the directors for existing programs and the one Associate Provost for the major in development. They were read a statement about the purpose of the dissertation, the kind of questions that would be asked, as well as the kind of documents I wanted to collect. Before these administrators gave consent, we talked about their programs as they currently exist and if they saw any changes developing for future implementation. None of the administrators were told about other participating universities. Although each asked which other universities were included in the dissertation. Each program

was told how I found them and if I had a preexisting connection to the university. None of the administrators were concerned about existing connections nor did they feel the need to discuss the connections.

### **Instrumentation**

The data-collection protocol for this study was based on a need to focus on the past, present, and future of the academic program while taking into account the program's status as described by faculty and staff involved with the programs. Interviews and document collection were employed to triangulate statements made about programs and their development. Politics plays an acute, though not always visible role in the development of programs (Augsburg & Henry, 2009). By comparing final documentation of policy changes with individual depictions of program development can highlight the perception of changes made and the purpose of the changes compared to the official account presented to the administration. This comparison particularly allows for a discussion of the role of prestige and aligning with university goals discussed in previous sections of this proposal.

### **Interviews**

Constructivism is the driving force behind using semi-structured interviews as a major component of data collection. According to constructivism "reality is constructed by individual interacting their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p.6) where "there are multiple interpretations of reality" (Merriam, 1998, p.22). Interviewing people involved in organizational change in IDS allows these individuals to vocalize their constructions and interpretations of the changes made. These multiple perspectives create a rounded, more holistic, understanding of what happened during the organizational change (Kezar, 2003). These interviews were semi-structured to allow

interviewees the ability to share their experiences and understanding of the organizational changes while also providing the structure necessary for collect sufficient, focused, data for analysis. This mixture of flexibility and planned data collection through piloted protocols employs recommendations from Stake (1995) and Yin (2002) respectively.

### **Interview participants.**

Those interviewed are divided between academics and administrators. Those in the academics camp are faculty members associated with the department. This can be either faculty who are currently involved with the major, or those formerly associated with the major. In the pilot for this dissertation this included faculty who taught courses housed in the same department as the IDS and taught the capstone course for the IDS.

The interviewed administrators range across multiple positions and levels of management. These administrators will include office staff, academic advisors, directors, and deans. In many cases there was overlap where an administrator was also a professor and lecturer within IDS. In addition to people currently holding these positions, I interviewed people who formerly held these positions. Former employees were particularly helpful in tracing the history of program faculty and staff turnover. It also provided key information about how shifts in leadership and power higher in administration affected programmatic changes.

In preparing for data collection, I contacted administrators at each research site. At Eastern State University I met via video chat with the current Director “Sam Winters.” He agreed to participate in the study as well as inform the rest of the department of the study, encouraging them to participate. I met “Julian Eaves,” the current director at Mission University and he agreed to participate in the study on the condition that the Dean agreed to participate. I then corresponded with Dean “Grady” via email explaining the dissertation and what participation

would entail. Dean Grady also agreed to participate in the dissertation. For Greendale I met with Dean “Jeff Winger” before meeting with director “Abed Nadir.” I was put in contact with Dean Winger because of outdated online information about his current position. He is the previous director of Greendale’s interdisciplinary major and has moved on to a deanship. He agreed that Greendale would be a good fit for my dissertation but that Abed Nadir would need to officially agree to participate. After a video chat with Abed Nadir he agreed to participate in the dissertation and has already shared some program documentation with me. Fernham College does not have a real director of their interdisciplinary program yet. As it is still in development, I spoke with the Associate Provost for Curriculum Development “Mandy Pepperidge.” She agreed to participate in the dissertation and to connect me to faculty members involved in the development of the major.

### **Interview protocol.**

The primary data collection tool is a five-section interview (See Appendix A). Each section’s goal is to learn more about the program in its current form, previous forms, and potential future iterations. The first section of the interview is categorized as a section about the interviewee’s personal background. This section asks questions about their professional training and path to the interdisciplinary major of the university at hand. This section provides the interviewer information about the participant’s knowledge of interdisciplinary programs and theory and potential sources of bias.

The second section focuses on the history of the interdisciplinary major. A series of questions about the curriculum, student body, organizational governance and the program’s current levels of success are first asked of the program as it is currently set up, and then about the program when the interviewee first joined the program. This portion of the interview will be



adjusted to address programs that are currently underdevelopment and have grown out of previous non-IDS programs.

The third section is titled “Natural Shocks.” This section focuses the participant on a specific moment in time where a significant change in the program took effect. This opens up the interview to organically follow the participant’s description of the development of changes, how they were implemented, and the aftermath of these choices. It asks the interviewee to reflect on why changes were made to the program and who was involved in the changes. It also acts as a failsafe to ensure the interviewee has time to discuss changes to the program that were not addressed in the “History” section of the interview. It also ensures provides a reminder for the interviewer to request access to documentation of changes made to the major.

The fourth section of the interview is defined as “Positioning.” This section allows the participant to describe IDS in relation to other IDS in terms of competitiveness as well as design. It also asks the interviewee to look to the future of the program and where they see the program going in terms of competition and design. It also invites the interviewee to contemplate their future with the program.

The final section of the interview is a single question: “What is the purpose of this major.” In the pilot this question was asked as a means to understand the interviewee’s understanding of the program and the purpose of interdisciplinary thought and exercises in general. Responses to this question ranged from stating the mission of the major to large philosophical tangents about the larger purposes of undergraduate education and how the IDS fulfill a variety of needs of the university. It is included in the dissertation as its own section because of this range of responses. The question aims to understand how the interviewee views

the purpose of the major not just for themselves, but also how it fits within the larger context of the university, undergraduate education, and student development.

### **Document Collection**

Documents were collected from each university to provide official statements of the state of the program and its situation within the larger university. While the interviews aimed to provide individual viewpoints of the organizational change, which may be filled with personal opinions, the documents provide the official organizational perspective of policy changes (Yin, 2012). They provide the end result and official record of organizational change. Document collection is also a way of closing gaps in knowledge. These gaps are partially due to the inability to cover all perspectives of change, or all time periods of change. They can also provide historical background and track the development of programs over time. This process of triangulating data establishes “converging lines of evidence to make [...] findings as robust as possible” (Yin, 2012, p.115). Document collection and analysis in conjunction with interviews provided the opportunity for triangulation. While triangulation does not provide the “best” understanding of events, it does allow for the representation of multiple perspectives that can allow researchers and reader to agree on a well-argued understanding of events and the meaning behind those events (Stake, 1995).

There were five forms of documentation collected. The first form of documentation was course catalogs. While not filled with extensive details, these provide introductory information into IDS and can easily trace curricular changes over time. Because course catalog content varies by university, some course catalogs will also provide information about Major leadership and involved faculty. These catalogs provide the most formal and public documentation of implemented IDS and their policies.

The second form of documentation collected were screenshots of the Majors' websites at the time of interviews to track any differences between what interviewers say the program accomplishes and what is portrayed online. This provides a comparison of an insider perspective with the most public facing aspect of the Major, what is most readily available to the public: the Major's website.

The third forms of documentation were any forms made available to students. These are often worksheets that help students map their way to graduation by planning out university and major requirements. They are the "nuts and bolts" of the major and are key for understanding the academic experience of the major. This will be most evident in discussions of academic rigor.

The fourth form of document collection is enrollment information from the Major as well as offices of institutional research. The information will be used to help determine the strength and popularity of the major. Few interviewees were able to give solid data on the change in size of the major. Enrollment data from the institutional research office was a source of reliable information about the growth and decrease in number of declared students.

The final form of document collection was programmatic changes that were approved or denied by faculty committees and senates. Some of these documents are public while others I requested from faculty or staff member to grant me access to these documents or make copies for me. These data provides a chronological documentation of proposed and accepted changes to the major.

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative case study, I employed data analysis procedures concurrent with Constructivist Theory (Saldana, 2015). In this section I discuss my inductive and deductive

coding procedures, and establishing validity measures. At the end of this chapter I will discuss the three key themes that emerged during data analysis.

### **Deductive and Inductive Procedures**

I used both deductive and inductive coding procedures in data analysis. Using deductive coding I organized data according to codes originating from the interview protocol and the dissertation's research questions. I employed this preliminary coding approach in conjunction with my first reading of the collected data (interviews, documents, and any other data). This descriptive and holistic approach created smaller units of data based on content (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2015). During this stage in analysis, I wrote extensive research memos to record first impressions and thoughts.

Following holistic coding, I employed an inductive coding procedure. As participants construct their reality and experiences in their interviews. Their language describing organizational change in their interdisciplinary studies major (IDS) was the source of codes at the heart of analysis. This focus on individual voice highlighted local factors at play at each research site. Part of this coding procedure attended to local factors to each research site (Miles et al, 2014).

In the second round of coding I consolidated codes and coded across sites. This horizontal coding allowed for coding within sites, as well as comparatively across sites (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). While Bartlett and Vavrus recommend starting this form of horizontal coding and comparison during the data collection process, I employed more traditional single case study coding as I completed data collection at each research site. Following the completion of each site's data collection, I began horizontal coding processes. Any horizontal comparisons I noticed

during data collection or singular case study coding was noted in research memos and expanded upon in the horizontal coding process.

## **Validity Measures**

The measures of validity that comes from quantitative research are not easily transferred to a qualitative study. However, the concern over creating a credible and transferable study remains pertinent. This section discusses the steps I took to establish credibility and transferability.

### **Credibility.**

A credible study is one that meets measures of methodological rigor. I accomplished this through four specific approaches: triangulation, respondent validation, saturation, and reflexivity. “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Triangulation was achieved by employing multiple methods, using multiple sources of data and multiple theories to confirm findings (Denzin, 1978). The multiple theories employed have been discussed previously in this proposal. The multiple methods were a combination of interviews and discourse analysis as discussed in a previous section. And the multiple sources of data are from the variety of individuals interviewed as well as the various sources of written materials to be included in the discourse analysis.

I employed respondent validation at multiple points in data collection and analysis. These member checks will ensure consistent analysis with participant experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This included sharing quotes in the dissertation with participants to ensure I correctly reflected their intended meaning.

To recognize saturation, I began the analysis process while simultaneously collecting data. Saturation was met when there was sufficient data collected, and further data collection had diminishing returns (Mason, 2010). This is the point where there was enough information to replicate the study or further coding did not provide additional, relevant, findings (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Saturation identification strategies vary based on study design, so I intend on following Fusch and Ness by identifying reach sufficient rich and thick data (2015), meaning I will have gathered sufficient quantity and quality of data.

The final category necessary to achieve credibility is a level of reflexivity. Reflexivity requires me to be forthcoming about myself in position to the research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I achieved some level of reflexivity in the process of choosing research sites. When interviewing each site to participate in my dissertation, I was explicit about any previous connection I had to the program as well as anything I already knew about the program.

### **Transferability.**

Transferability is another means of ascertaining interpretive rigor. This measure of validity is related to outcomes of research, not the process of data collection itself (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011). Unlike a quantitative study, a qualitative study cannot be exactly replicated; therefore transferability refers to “the extent to which a study’s findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p.256). One way of achieving this is by choosing sites that achieve maximum variation (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Though this dissertation was restricted in size, consideration was taken to provide a variety of contexts in research sites. This coverage of variation provided the potential to apply findings to other contexts similar to those in the dissertation. Ability to compare context and achieve

transferability was achieved through thick descriptions. These thick descriptions were key aspects of the analysis stages to place analysis within specific contexts.

### **Three Key Themes: Faculty, Rigor, Departmental Relationships**

The Comparative Case Study analysis produced three key themes across all four research sites: Faculty, Rigor, and Departmental Relationships. Each of these themes was discussed differently at each university, but was present and part of how participants conceptualized organizational change and the sustainability of IDS at their university. The codebook for these key themes and all coded themes is included in Appendix C.

Faculty plays an important role in not only running IDS but also representing interdisciplinarity to the rest of the university. Each university has a different composition of tenure track faculty and adjunct faculty. The number of faculty members as well as how they interact with each other is a key part of how IDS function on an administrative level, manage teaching loads, grow the program, and develop sustainable practices.

Each program conceptualizes rigorous programming differently. Each program talks about providing the framework for students to explore their intellectual curiosity across disciplinary traditions. Programs identify themselves as succeeding when they graduate students who they feel can integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives in an interdisciplinary senior thesis. Some programs acknowledge that their students struggle to accomplish this level of integration, but that their students can make a succinct argument over the course of a thesis.

IDS work with departments across each campus as they rely on disciplinary departments to teach IDS students. Each IDS develops their relationship with other programs on campus. This relationship is a key part of administering IDS and influences how integrated IDS is on campus.

Some programs work closely with disciplinary departments while others place students in their classes without much interaction.



### **Chapter 3: Eastern State University**

Eastern State University (ESU) underwent a routine program review in 2012 with the purpose to “sustain excellence in each scholarly discipline, as well as in pedagogy and research, and to build a strong and inclusive academic community, in line with campus priorities” (University Division of Academic Planning Website). The findings of that review and the ensuing changes are the focus on this chapter.

The ESU program review was filled with words of encouragement and support, as well as concern over the rigor of the program and tenure faculty involvement. In fact, many of the suggestions from the review were ways to support development that was already in place. Despite this encouragement, the overall tone of the review inspired fear with concerns that the program would be shut down or put it into receivership. The review made several suggestions to improve the standing of the program. These included: involving more ladder faculty in the program; bringing the program into standardized governance structures like other disciplinary departments; as well as a variety of ways to ensure the rigor of courses included in the requirements for the major.

#### **Changes Made to IDS after 2012**

The first major change to be made was the appointment of a new Director. The sitting Director, Camille Shafer, was a continuing lecturer who had been involved with the program for many years. She was a well-respected researcher in her disciplinary community, but found work as a lecturer rather than a ladder faculty position. The Dean of the overseeing college asked for nominations for the directorship. Their first choice was unwilling to take on the leadership role, but suggested Sam Winters, who accepted the position. Sam Winters is a tenured History professor with extensive leadership in interdisciplinary initiatives both in the United States and

abroad. Winters came into a department filled with lecturing faculty. When Winters took over the directorship “he basically took the recommendations of the review committee and just began checking them off. Going through the program, reforming it to address those concerns” (Joe Kane, 2018).

Another significant change to the program regards required courses and a renewed focus on original research. The review cited the strength of the program as resting in the research process, so they recommended coursework to support that process. A previously optional research methods course to be taken before the thesis course became required. This course was not simple a preparation for the thesis, but a way to introduce students

broadly to the various kinds of methods that are used to produce reliable knowledge so that students would be prepared to do research projects in the future and be able to choose the kind of method that would be most appropriate for the research question. [Sam] really wanted us to graduate researchers, people who had skills in research (Joe Kane, 2019).

This course also provides a venue to introduce students to exemplary interdisciplinary research. The course aims to prepare students to write a thesis by producing a research proposal in close conjunction with a faculty member, introduce them to a variety of ways to ask research questions, and introduce unique disciplinary methodological approaches embedded in disciplines’ epistemological histories. When Winters implemented this change, the IDS major accepted research methodology coursework from across the university (but predominately from the social sciences). This was a way of ensuring students who were already declared in the major could graduate on time. For new students entering the major, they would need to complete this methodology coursework requirement inside the IDS major, few exceptions would be made.

As changes were made regarding thesis preparation, changes were made to the thesis itself. Early in his directorship, Winters wrote new guidelines for the major establishing it on the same level of academic integrity as ESU's History Major (Winter's home department and the only other major at ESU with a required thesis). These new guidelines were published in the student handbook. Previous student handbooks did not explicitly write out the requirements or standards of the final thesis. Additionally, the thesis now required original research, rather than a proposal or literature review. This is an explicit step towards institutionalizing the IDS major into university norms.

All of these changes coincided with a turnover in lecturing faculty. From the time of the review to beginning of interviews, four lecturers retired and three new lecturers hired. Additionally, the dean who oversees IDS retired. Only one lecturer and two support staff remain from the pre-review program. One of the side effects of this turnover is an uneven distribution of students per lecturer as advisor. The one lecturer who remains, Joe Kane, says he advises 25% to 50% of the students in the major. This level of advising includes reviewing courses included in students' course plans, assisting the application process, and supporting students from admission through graduation. Joe cites this uneven workload to his longevity in the program as well as being the only American lecturer as the other lecturer are international scholars.

The final changes to the major regard admittance to the major. Students now need to meet a minimum GPA on pre-requisite courses. A request was made for all students to a minimum general GPA, but this request was denied by the Chair of the College's Executive Committee. The minimum pre-requisite GPA was a compromise. Additionally, the application moved from rolling admissions to a fixed deadline to apply. With a fixed deadline, the Faculty

Advisory Board reviews all applications and admissions decisions are made by that body rather than individual lecturers.

### **Ladder Faculty versus Lecturing Faculty**

A recurring theme from the program review is a call for more ladder faculty involvement. This was reiterated throughout the review as important for bringing the program into standardized governance structures at the university. This push was the driving force behind replacing Camille Shafer with Sam Winters. Finally, the concern over a lack of ladder faculty is rooted in a misunderstanding of how IDS programs function in universities.

The text of the review cites the need to include ladder faculty in all stages of the IDS major. The review writers assume the lecturers cannot provide sufficient expertise to oversee theses that cover multiple disciplinary perspectives. There is also a call for senate faculty to engage in reading student theses to provide disciplinary experience. A senate faculty advisor would be best suited to reaching out to faculty as readers that match with student research interests. The strongest argument the review makes for the involvement of ladder faculty is that only ladder faculty have content expertise and only ladder faculty are capable of forging connections across disciplines to recruit theses readers.

The text of the review does not go into detail regarding why a non-ladder faculty members cannot meet these goals. The review provides reasons the director should be ladder faculty, but no explanation as to why the director must be ladder faculty. The review seems to conflate the desire to have ladder faculty as the director with need to have ladder faculty as the director.

## **Lack of Communication with Lecturing Faculty about the Importance of Ladder Involvement**

With this conflation, the faculty and staff of IDS were told a new director would be put into place and that person would be ladder faculty. It also appears as if the whole review was not shared with everyone involved in IDS. A former lecturer with the program recalled the lack of explanation from the dean regarding the program review and shift towards ladder faculty:

[The program review] appeared to criticize Camille Shafer for her handling of the major, and insisting on a ladder faculty member to run the program. When the dean presented this to us in a faculty meeting, I said, "Why?" He says, "It's just a principle that needs to be followed." I said, "What's the basis of the principle?" He said, "It's just a principle.

(Ray Griffen, 2019)

The faculty were not allowed to read the entire program review and had to rely on their conversations with the Dean to understand the findings. Rather than explaining the concerns over the lack of ladder faculty involvement, the dean at the time brushed off this question. Griffen was not the only faculty member who could not explain the sudden focus on ladder faculty. The current senior lecturer, Joe Kane, could not cite a definitive reason as to the need for a ladder faculty director.

I think it's just the way university governance works. If we're going to invest them with the power to hire, fire, promote, determine schedules, hand out discipline, you need someone with ladder faculty to do that kind of thing, though I've done a lot of that work not as ladder faculty. (Joe Kane, 2019)

Kane highlights a lack of understanding of the call for ladder faculty on behalf of those involved in IDS and a key misunderstanding of how IDS programs function from the perspective of the review committee. Kane explains that it is logical to want ladder faculty to be involved in all of

the key aspects of running IDS. But he also points out that the title of ladder faculty is not necessary to accomplish these goals. Kane sees himself as a de facto leader of IDS; it is unclear how much of this job he would be able to do without the permission allotted by tenured Sam Winters. One explanation of the importance of a ladder faculty as director of the program is related to Julie Thompson Klein's theory of how to build strong interdisciplinarity on campus. Klein argues that strong interdisciplinary programs use institutionalization to their benefit. The more an IDS program looks and functions like a disciplinary program, the more successful the program will be on campus (Klein, 2009). Putting a ladder faculty in the director position follows this model. A ladder faculty member directs every disciplinary department. For IDS to function like every disciplinary department on campus, they too must have a ladder faculty member as director.

The shift from Shafer to Winters was a key moment of change for the IDS program. Camille Shafer, a continuing lecturer for years, ran IDS. Winters felt that placing a lecturer in a leadership position threatened the quality of IDS:

I was called in at a moment when the major was in difficult shape facing many challenges and without a ladder faculty director, and so the Dean reached out and asked me if I would take over a program that wasn't quite in receivership but that was headed that way and thus really needed direction, especially from a regular faculty member. A continuing lecturer ran it at the time. (Sam Winters, 2019)

Winters connects the lack of ladder faculty in leadership positions to the lack of rigor in the program and its shaky position at the university. Winters argues under Shafer's leadership the program became lack luster and lost focus. However, Kane maintains that Shafer ran a successful and rigorous program and

argued vigorously for her being treated as research faculty, and I made the case that her book was so widely cited at an international level that she should be considered ladder faculty. Nobody was biting on that. She's very measured, but I think there's still a mystery. Maybe she knows it, but for the rest of us it was a mystery of why people were gunning for her.” (Joe Kane, 2019)

This language of “gunning” points to how the change from Shafer to Winters was viewed as a decision to oust an individual rather than an organizational choice informed by practices across the university. The organizational changes inspired by the program review matched the IDS program with other existing governance structures.

### **Changes to Ensure Students Work with Ladder Faculty**

Along with concerns of lack of senate faculty leadership, the review cited concerns over who teaches IDS majors. The review, as well as the faculty involved in the program recount the importance of ladder faculty teaching in upper division coursework. The review highlights the seeming lack of ladder faculty involvement:

Compounding the lack of specialized oversight of student theses is IDS’s relative isolation from Senate faculty. The OPA data show that since 2001-02 Senate faculty has taught no upper-division courses in IDS with the exception of three instances: 8% in both 2002-03 and 2003-04 and 7% in 2006-07. (Program Review Documentation, 2013)

According to the Program Review, it appears as if IDS students do not work with ladder faculty members in their coursework. However, this ignores the structure of IDS programs and who teaches upper division courses elsewhere in the university. The IDS program’s design relies on coursework taken outside of the major. The only courses that are required to be taken inside the major are the methods course (made a requirement after the review) and the thesis course. The

rest of the coursework occurs in the disciplinary departments of the university. Coursework in other majors, even at the upper division level, is not guaranteed to be with ladder faculty. Prior to the Program Review, IDS students were advised to take courses with faculty whom they shared research and are leading researchers in their areas of interest.

What we do do because of that concern, what I do a lot of, is it's not so much necessarily focusing on the students taking classes with ladder faculty but focusing on taking classes with professors who are actively researching at the cutting edge what they're interested in. That turns out invariably to be ladder faculty. So, when we do our advising, since they don't take most of their courses in house, they take them across campus, we get them to study with ladder faculty that way, but that takes a lot of hands-on work by me to look at with whom they're taking classes and knowledge of who the faculty are on campus who are cutting edge. (Joe Kane, 2019)

This was something lecturers addressed with their advisees before the review. They understood there was a need for students to work intensively with researchers and IDS could not provide that academic experience in-house because it is a teaching unit. Kane and the other lecturer/advisors included these ladder faculty members as people who work with IDS, even if they do not realize it. However, Kane hints there may be faculty across campus that have relationships with IDS that are forged in conversations with the lecturing faculty and advisors of IDS. For the IDS lecturers/advisors to successfully assist students find top researchers in their fields, the lecturers/advisors need to be knowledgeable of the researchers on campus as well as the current research in those fields. Referring to the Program Review Committee's concern that lecturing faculty could not possibly have expertise in all fields is not entirely true, as they have enough



knowledge to know what is at the cutting edge of those fields on campus and who on campus can work with undergraduates with varying interests.

Kane challenges the Program Review Committee's assumption that it is always better to study with ladder faculty. Kane feels the push for the involvement of more tenure track faculty by arguing they are the best teachers is a personal offense to his teaching.

We could say that we want our students to work with ladder faculty, but sometimes they're not great teachers, or they're consumed by their research, or they're teaching at a level which doesn't reach the students, and the students would rather take the courses with the lecturers. That's also happening in the departments themselves. We're relying more on lecturers because they can be effective teachers. (Joe Kane, 2019)

Kane challenges the idea that ladder faculty are the best source of knowledge and learning for undergraduate students. The Program Review Committee pushes for the involvement of more ladder faculty, but Kane challenges the idea that working closely with ladder faculty does not necessarily have the intended benefits. Kane asserts that not all ladder faculty are efficient teachers, whereas lecturers are unionized based on their teaching reviews. This is not an experience unique to IDS, but one that exists across ESU.

Finally, it is important to address the Program Review Committee's lack of understanding of Interdisciplinary Theory and how a single person can provide disciplinary insight across multiple knowledge systems. While the Program Review Committee thought the lecturers did excellent work, they were unaware of how Interdisciplinary Theory allows individuals to work with varying levels of expertise across disciplines.

The excellent work of the teaching faculty cannot possibly extend to being experts in every potential subject area of every interdisciplinary thesis. This creates the potential for

the production of well-polished theses that necessarily lie outside areas of the teaching faculty's empirical expertise. (Program Review Documentation, 2013)

Interdisciplinary Theory allows for individuals to work across disciplinary boundaries as long as the researcher does their due diligence to find common ground across disciplines and theoretical frameworks (Repko, Szostak, & Buchberger, 2019). It is not assumed that this is easy work, however, it is assumed that it is possible. The assumption that drawing expertise from multiple disciplinary silos is not possible is based in the disciplines and is embedded in the belief that disciplinary silos are valuable and inherently powerful and cannot be crossed. The viewpoint that ladder faculty based in the disciplines can provide expertise for students while lecturers cannot also devalues the expertise the lecturing faculty hold in their own disciplines which at ESU are interdisciplinary in themselves. This interdisciplinarity makes the lecturing faculty the perfect advisors to help students reach across disciplinary silos in their own research.

### **New Lecturing Staff at Eastern State University Provide Multiple Interdisciplinary Perspectives**

Questioning the expertise of the lecturing faculty begs the question of who are the lecturing faculty. Four lecturing faculty retired in the five years after Sam Winters became the director. Winters, in with consultation Joe Kane and Faculty Advisory Board member Brad Harvey, hired three new lecturing faculty members. Only two of these new faculty members agreed to interviews. These two new teaching faculty members have doctorates in programs that are by nature interdisciplinary. They research in areas that cross disciplinary silos. As their research does not fit within established disciplinary norms at universities, they both cited difficulties finding work on the academic job market.

Joe Kane's disciplinary background at the undergraduate level is in political science and philosophy. He then started a PhD in Political Theory but completed his dissertation in an Ethnic Studies program. Before coming to IDS at ESU, he taught in ESU's Rhetoric department as a lecturer. His research is interdisciplinary in nature and can be found in journals of Critical Theory as well as Political Economy.

Alvin Mack holds a PhD in History, Anthropology and Science Technology in Society, run jointly by History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society departments. His undergraduate degree is in Electronic Engineering. Mack applied to the lecturing position at ESU because he had not had luck during his job search and was going to be graduating soon without a job. He applied to the program because it was interdisciplinary and they were looking for a person to teach research methods. He felt he was fully capable of teaching research methods in an interdisciplinary setting due to his interdisciplinary doctoral training. Mack shared a moment of candor he had with Winters regarding why he was hired:

Even here I think one reason I got this job was because they wanted somebody to teach [Science, Technology, and Society]. As Sam [Winters] told me once in a moment of candor, he said he looked at my CV and thought: "He's going to have a hard time finding a job." It worked out. (Alvin Mack, 2019)

Mack's degree positions him to research wicked problems that are inherently interdisciplinary. However, his lack of a singular disciplinary background made it hard for him to market himself on the job market. It was this distinctive attribute that made him stand out to Winters. There was a level of acknowledgement that while interdisciplinary work is well regarded in theory, it is not always rewarded in practice in the form of employment at the tenure level.

The other lecturer hired during Winters' directorship is Autumn Haley. Haley holds a Bachelor's degree in Advertising and Marketing, a Masters degree in sociology and a PhD in Urban Sociology. Haley is currently editing her dissertation and publishing it as a book. Haley cited the interdisciplinary nature of her research as the reason she was hired at ESU. Haley also taught research methods for three years at her doctoral institution.

I've taught research methods for three years in [Large East Coast City]. That's kind of a building component of my PhD program. [...] They are looking for someone with strong social science but also practical empirical research experience in teaching research methods. (Autumn Haley, 2019)

Haley's curriculum vitae matches the Program Review's call for stronger methodological grounding. Her background in interdisciplinary research and teaching made her a strong candidate and someone who could easily teach the courses the Program Review Committee needed to be strengthened.

### **IDS' Relationship with Other Departments**

As previously discussed in the section on the differences between the ladder faculty and lecturing faculty, the Program Review Committee was concerned about the lack of interaction IDS students have with ladder faculty. Kane calls attention to students working with ladder and lecturing faculty outside of the major with a particular emphasis placed on taking courses with researchers at the top of their fields. Another move to include more ladder faculty was to reinvigorate the Faculty Advisory Board.

There was at the time no governance structure per se for the program. I instituted a faculty advisory board for oversight purposes, but until then there was nothing. And that

faculty advisory board is just what its name suggests, it's only there as a consulting body, not as a governing or executive body. (Sam Winters, 2019)

This also provided a way for IDS to integrate the Humanities into the program rather than focus solely on social sciences. While this body is not filled with people who represent their departments, it is filled with people who represent their disciplines. The current Faculty Advisor Board (2019-2020) is comprised of faculty from: Economics, Public Health, Art History, Education, English, History, Rhetoric, German, Law, and Sociology. The members of the Faculty Advisory Board may not provide significant programmatic connections between IDS, but they do provide a means to develop relationships with the programs that teach IDS students. A key part of building these relationships is that the overseeing faculty body has a say in who declares as an IDS major. It is this faculty body that reviews and accepts applications to the major. The involvement of the Faculty Advisory Board has brought ladder faculty from other departments into a more integral role than simply teaching students without knowing if IDS majors were in their class.

### **Identity as a Refugee Major Questions the Rigor of IDS**

The term was first used in this dissertation at Mission University, but applies to concerns expressed across all research sites. A Refugee Major is an academic major that students turn to when they are unable to declare in their preferred major for a variety of reasons. Those reasons can include: not passing pre-requisites, not being accepted into an impacted major, and waiting too long to declare and needing to declare a major so the student can graduate on time. Kane describes who some of these students are and why they turn to IDS:

We do have students who have lost their way often. Sometimes it's because they were in the hard sciences and they weren't suited for it, and they need to make a switch. That's

often very exciting and things often turn out very well for them. They were a physics or applied math major, and they weren't interested or they weren't interested enough to keep their grades up, or it was too difficult for them to think in that way. So, we get some students transferring out of the hard sciences in their junior year looking for a new path. We do have students who have been rejected from what are called impacted majors, so we have students who didn't get into Econ or [business school]. (Joe Kane, 2019)

These students are not necessarily “strong” or “weak” students. Rather they are students that struggled in a particular area. When they come to IDS they can refocus and finish their education successfully. This description of IDS as a Refugee Major goes against Sam Winters’ attempts to make IDS an elite major. Winters proposed that for students to declare IDS, they would need to meet a general minimum GPA. This was not approved and instead a minimum GPA requirement for prerequisites was instated. The label “Refugee Major” does not preclude honors students. However, requiring all students to be honors students would restrict enrollment and exclude students who would succeed in the major. This part of the refugee major identity is one Kane enjoys because “student fails out in something, it's a moment for renewal and rebirth and thinking of something new to do” (2019).

### **Rigorous Programming**

Part of the concerns around the label “Refugee Major” is that it insinuates the program lacks rigor: anyone can show up to the major, at any point in their academic career, and graduate. Refugee Majors contend with the concern that they do not provide academically meaningful experiences.

To counter this narrative, Sam Winters successfully proposed and implemented several policy changes to increase the number of high performing students in the major. Winters

understood that refugee majors have “important role to play; it just didn't seem appropriate for this program to be doing that. Those are students that again we targeted to eliminate for admission to the program in the subsequent years” (Sam Winters, 2019). As a part of rebranding the program as something other than a Refugee Major, Winters

put the message across all of our materials that this is for people who primarily want to do interdisciplinary research on social issues and social problems, in terms of trying to settle our ... To come up with a consistent brand, I guess. Major brand. (Steve Lattimer, 2019)

The first step in increasing the rigor of the program was to increase the perception of the program's rigor. Lattimer also commented on “interdisciplinarity” being a buzzword on campus so it is important for IDS to make a point about how their program is rigorous and does not use the term as a way of grabbing attention. For Winters, a key aspect of developing a rigorous program starts with changing how the campus talks about the program. Kane believes Winters “brought in language that better communicated [the focus on research], both to the students and also to the campus community in terms of providing a better description of what the program was” (2019). Winters accomplished this by highlighting the research aspects of the program. The Program Review cited the research aspect of the program as a key strength. Winters wanted to take this idea and expand on it:

My vision of the program in coming in was actually quite explicit that I wanted to underscore the research dimensions of the program and in fact really rethink the definition of a liberal arts education so that it included not only critical thinking and analytical reasoning and perhaps public speaking but also research, and research being something more than just Wikipedia or Googling. (Sam Winters, 2019)

Winters argues that all students will need research skills, because all jobs require some level of research skill. Even if students do not go on to graduate education, they will need the skills associated with empirical research. The call for empirical research was a shift from the most previous iteration of the IDS program that accepted literature reviews as the senior thesis.

Winters' opinion is that literature reviews are not empirical work, nor do they sufficiently engage students in research processes to count as a substantial and sufficient capstone experience.

The conceptual shift Winters made for IDS regarding "the definition of liberal arts education" to one that highlights student research was not received well by all of the lecturing faculty. Retired lecturer Ray Griffen's reaction exemplified responses to this change:

I'm not a big proponent of majors in general. Unless you are specializing in organic chemistry or something like that, or something that requires specific expertise in a field, I think for most undergraduates a broad liberal arts education is more than sufficient, is in fact great for them. (Ray Griffen, 2019)

Winters wanted to change this understanding of what constitutes a liberal arts education. Winters saw changes that focus on research as a means to increase the rigor of the program. However, much of the lecturing faculty saw it as a move away from liberal arts education, which they felt was the goal of the IDS program. With these changes, the majority of the teaching faculty chose to retire. The lecturers had taught for decades and were at retirement age. Winters describes these lecturers and the program as in a "holding pattern for at least a couple of decades." These retirements created the opportunity for Winters to

hire young, energetic, interesting interdisciplinary scholars, as it turns out, by recruiting globally as much as locally so that in fact the three lecturers that were hired under my



direction came from quite far afield even if they had been trained in North America. (Sam Winters, 2019)

These retirements provided the opportunity for Winters to hire a team of lecturers that share his vision of liberal arts education. It also provided the opportunity to hire lecturers with experience teaching research methods and varying spectrum of research expertise. Winters' hiring choices favored people with social science backgrounds, but with dissimilar disciplinary training.

### **The Application Process as an Hurdle**

After taking steps to change the perception of the program in the university and other disciplinary programs, Winters moved to increase the rigor of the program by changing the application and the application process with the goal of changing the caliber of students accepted into the program. As previously discussed, the program now requires a minimum GPA (a B minus) for prerequisites. However, this did not significantly change the average GPA of the program. Along with the required minimum GPA, the application process became "tighter" according to Kane.

The new application process holds all students to the same level of scrutiny and requires approval from multiple disciplinary perspectives on the Faculty Advisory Board. Previously, individual lecturers approved applications to the major on a rolling basis. The first goal of the new application process is to ensure that students think through why they want to be an IDS major, and how they will fulfill the requirements. It is also an opportunity to identify and exclude any Refugee Majors. The desire to exclude these students is not shared across the IDS major. Kane disagrees and enjoys working with Refugee Majors.

That never really bothered me that much, being a place for second chances, and also people with a chip on their shoulder can be great. They can work really hard, so I never

mind that but Sam wanted to change it and to make it an elite major. I don't think it really turned out that way. (Joe Kane, 2019)

Kane argues that there is value in being a Refugee Major, a place for students to succeed, but it means IDS cannot be an elite major. What is interesting for this dissertation is how making a program more rigorous does not necessarily change who joins the program. The program is perceived as more rigorous because the students jump through more hoops (a more structured application process), rather than simply declaring for the major a la Michael Scott declaring “Bankruptcy” by simple walking into a room and shouting “I declare Bankruptcy!” (Lieberstein, 2007). Students need to prove and support their desire to declare as an IDS major. A simple conversation with a lecturer was no longer a sufficient defense, the equivalent of walking into the lecturer’s office and shouting “I declare IDS!”

Despite these changes, the population of the major did not necessarily change. The size of the major has fluctuated slightly, but remained relatively stable. Lattimer cites differences in opinion from the administration about how large the major should be and when that clashes with Winters’ vision for the major. While Winters was attempting to shrink the major, Dean Shane saw the value of IDS as a Refugee Major and wanted to expand the major in that role. These internal, political, forces were at odds with each other. And in this case, they both won to some extent. Winters implemented his application process to raise the caliber of accepted IDS students. However, because the number of declared students did not change significant, Shane achieves his goal of providing academically meaningful experiences for all students rather than elite students only.

## **The Coursework and Thesis Increase Rigor and Match Institutional Norms**

As part of a more regimented application process, Winters instituted a “more rigorous assessment of the plan of study, and it really had to amount to something coherent instead of just a slapdash of courses” (Joe Kane, 2019). Previously, a plan of study was determined in conjunction with the lecturing faculty who serve as students’ advisors. Together, the student and advisor developed a plan of study that was somewhat pre-determined, but also relatively ad-hoc. This approach to course plan development was replaced by Winters’ new application process that required students to establish a plan of study previous to declaring the major.

The two required courses for the major were re-worked, with particular emphasis placed on the pre-thesis course. Winters modified the optional pre-thesis course into a mandatory and explicitly “precursive course to writing the senior thesis” (Joe Kane, 2019). This course developed from a simple pre-thesis course into an explicit research methods course that

introduced [students] more broadly to the various kinds of methods that are used to produce reliable knowledge so that students would be prepared to do research projects in the future and be able to choose the kind of method that would be most appropriate for the research question. [Winters] really wanted us to graduate researchers, people who had skills in research. (Joe Kane, 2019)

This course is a major component of Winters’ moves to increase the rigor of the program.

Winters’ expressed desire to produce students capable of original research is supported through the development of the new pre-thesis course. This course does not necessarily raise the caliber of students entering the major, but it does develop their marketable skill set for when they graduate. Preparation for the thesis provides a learning experience about the production of knowledge before the thesis, as students are introduced to multiple research methods, not only

the ones they will use in their thesis. While this introduction cannot be in-depth for all research methods, it does provide an introduction that assists students later in their careers in how they think about research and what are answerable questions.

A senior thesis has been part of the IDS curriculum as the capstone experience for as long as any interviewee could recount. The capstone thesis is a key part the curriculum; it provides a means for students to integrate their course content and research from across multiple disciplines into a single document. However, what was accepted as a capstone thesis changed when Winters took over as director. The Program Review Committee was

worried about standards. They were right. Sam came in here, and he raised the standards for what the thesis should be like. He took the standards from history and he applied them here. It did raise standards in the program to have ladder faculty. Somebody coming from the outside, who knew what were acceptable standards in the other departments to make sure we didn't lag behind them. That was a really important invention. Reset our expectations in accordance with general university standards, and having ladder faculty helped do that. (Joe Kane, 2019)

The thesis was raised to be in line with the expectations of the only other majors on campus with a required senior thesis. This was an important part of raising the rigor of the program in the eyes of the rest of the university as well as in terms of what students were expected to accomplish by graduation. This institutionalization matches with theoretical and practical approaches to develop interdisciplinary strength (Augsburg & Henry, 2009; Klein, 2009).

### **IDS Lacks Formal Assessment to Measure Programmatic Rigor and Growth**

While discussions of rigor and building a rigorous program are forefront in change discourse under Sam Winters' directorship, there is little discussion of how the rigor of the

program, and the success of the program in general are assessed. There are no assessment plans for the Winters changes or for the success of the program in general. While there are no formal measures of success, there are a variety of ways individuals look for indicator of successful students. Sam Winters elaborates:

Again, we haven't developed a formal apparatus, a formal metric of success. We have anecdotal information, including the fact that two years ago we had a university medalist and last year we had a finalist for Rhodes Scholar and so on. But there is no set of metrics in place to do that. For assessment, we rely very much on the experience of the instructors and their appraisal of the relative quality of the work that's being done. There is actually now I instituted a monthly luncheon with instructors to continue to track the overall quality of work that was done in the program, among other things. (Sam Winters, 2019)

This speaks to several areas individuals point to in measuring success in the major, while lacking a formal metric. These measures include individual student academic successes as well as the thesis as a measure of the quality of student work. Not included in Winters' measures of success, but included by other members of the department are: neoliberal outcomes such as career and graduate school related outcomes; providing a means for struggling students to graduate; and exit surveys. Participants raised questions of validity around any form of survey students complete as well as a lack of general data to make any reliable assessment of the program.

#### **Neoliberal outcomes measure student success post-graduation.**

Neoliberal outcomes can be divided into two categories: jobs and graduate school. In both instances, the measure of success is put in a student's ability to find a career. That career can be immediate or related to further academic achievement. In these cases, a successful

program is related to students achieving a private good and success through their degree. While college education is often described as a means towards and ends (specifically a career), it is the focus on the degree as a private good that gives this form of assessment a neoliberal slant (Olssen and Peters, 2005). For discussions of graduate school, pursuing a graduate degree is connected to pursuing an individual interest, a private good. In both cases, measures of career are inherently related to the ability to make money. For Alvin Mack, this neoliberal approach means students are able to follow and academic interest in college and then find a career in that same area of interest.

I personally would like it if I had students who wrote a thesis that was in science and technology studies and so they did this interdisciplinary analysis of science and technology. Some do, but that's a very sort of personal thing. Somebody who writes a good STS thesis can get into a STS graduate program to do research. I would be very happy but I don't think that's what most students want and that shouldn't be the criteria for success anyway. (Alvin Mack, 2019)

Mack is not comfortable with career trajectory as a formal measure of success. He caveats his answer by taking the stance that neoliberal measures are not suitable to academic situations. Despite this caveat, his first answer to the question was an answer rooted in a neoliberal understanding of the academy. Steve Lattimer makes a similar argument to Mack by focusing on what students will take from the program and into the marketplace: “inculcate marketable skills, research skills, writing skills, so on and so forth, that they can take with them into the market, wherever they intend to go with that” (2019). Lattimer is unconcerned with what students pursue post-graduation, but he sees the value in students learning transferable skills.

Lattimer and Mack apply measures to IDS students in a silo. Alternative, Camille Shafer measures IDS success by comparing IDS students to students in other departments. Shafer measures the success of the program by looking at the average income of IDS students 10 years after graduate compared to Sociology students. Shafer references a survey conducted by a central office on campus and has a notoriously low response rate. This issue of low response rates is raised by participants and is discussed later in this section. Shafer also points to statistical analysis she did in the Program Review that eventually led to her removal from the directorship. While she claimed this information is available to me, it was not and is not publicly available.

Another common measure of success is the percentage of students who enter graduate programs after completing their IDS degree. However, professors are aware this measure is not always the best measure of success.

They really want a high GPA or very driven students. I think early on they were still talking about entering grad school as one of the indicator of success, but given how the academic job market is, at least I turned down this expectations and then it's more about, you know, not only grow to be a scholar but also a good person and then in the research process (Autumn Haley, 2019)

Her wariness of associating graduate education with success is rooted in the current academic job market and how a graduate degree is not a good indicator of future employment. Haley points to the skills associated with research and how those skills themselves are better measures of success rather than their connection to a graduate degree. Additionally, the rate of graduate school for IDS students was on par with other departments in the College of Letters and Science (IDS' governance home). Percentages of students in graduate school did not make the program stand out as being of higher quality than any other program in the college.

**The thesis provides a capstone experience to gauge student growth but not always interdisciplinarity.**

The thesis completed as the capstone experience is indicated as the best way to measure student growth and success on the individual level as well as at the programmatic level. The thesis is considered the lowest form of assessment: has the student been able to complete a good thesis. However, what a good thesis means is not agreed upon. Alvin Mack argues that a good thesis makes an original claim and provides support. However Mack does not include interdisciplinarity as a measure of what makes a good thesis. He argues: “I wouldn't say the final product is not always interdisciplinary, but I think if you can make a claim and support it then I think IDS trained you well” (2019). The measure of “make a claim and support it” is not unique to IDS. Rather, it is a measure of success that could be used in any department in the College of Letters and Science. Because this measure is not unique to IDS, it positions IDS like every other major in the College of Letters and Science.

Connected to Mack’s assessment of a good thesis is Autumn Haley’s focus on the research practices learned in the research process.

I would say a student is able to run their own research project. They might incorporate study abroad program in. If they are international student, they might incorporate their hometown network and then be able to travel. Really connecting empirical data and write it up, so it will be people skills and writing skills they can deliver. (2019)

The process of researching and writing, “pushes them to be an adult” as students are responsible for the whole process. (Autumn Haley, 2019). This includes understanding how to maneuver through hurdles in the process and adjust their expectations to fit their context and deadline.

Both Mack and Haley focus on the thesis capstone product: a performative measure of their time in IDS. However, the topic or subject of the thesis is not considered a defining aspect



of success. Ray Griffen differs from these other two ways of looking at the thesis with an explicit focus on student interest. Griffen identifies a success much major as: “To me, I thought if a student could do something that they were really interested in that was interdisciplinary and that allowed them to do a thesis on a topic they were interested in, that was about as successful as we could hope for.” (2019)

Griffen is the only person to explicitly cite an interdisciplinary thesis is a key measure of success. Mack acknowledged that most theses were not truly interdisciplinary and Haley never discussed the need for an explicitly interdisciplinary thesis. Griffen’s broader views of the thesis were not shared by Sam Winters and were part of Griffen’s decision to retire. Not because he disagreed, but because he saw this as a perfect moment to retire when he felt he was naturally parting ways with the program. Griffen was willing to accept literature reviews as theses as long as they followed the student’s interest and were interdisciplinary. Sam Winters moved away from this model and towards an empirical thesis to demonstrate rigor.

### **Student graduation rate as a simple measure of student completion.**

On the opposite end of the success spectrum from students attending graduate school, are students who struggle to complete their undergraduate education. The IDS major often functions as a Refugee Major. This is not a new identity for the major, but one that has existed for many years. One measure of programmatic success is if IDS helps students complete their undergraduate degree that otherwise may stop out.

I wanted the students to get through because I didn't think it's of any advantage to anyone if they don't finish and we had a very high success rate. I don't know the figures anymore but, we were successful in working sometimes with very difficult situations and I think

precisely because we were a good team with different strengths and corporation and so we got students through. (Camille Shafer, 2019)

Shafer highlights the strengths of her faculty in helping students complete their degree. Her focus on students' needs rather than the program itself highlights Shafer's focus on serving the student however possible. Graduating struggling students is cited as a measure of success without any available data regarding what percentage of IDS majors fit this description or if this is a larger population in IDS compared to other majors in the college.

Steve Lattimer joined IDS as an academic advisor at the transition to Sam Winters' leadership. Even with Winters' desire to make IDS an elite program, the program remains a Refugee Major for some students. Lattimer describes being a Refugee Major as a service to the university by ensuring their graduation rates remain high.

Some of these students have come in that have no other place to go. They maybe had a very low GPA. They were trending towards leaving the university when they came to us, and with us they would graduate with a degree. So, I think that can be construed as successful. (Steve Lattimer, 2019)

Like Shafer, Lattimer sees IDS as serving students who need help. A successful major is at once something at the individual level, but also the university level. Stopping out does not help students after investing their time, money, and energy into a degree. It is also bad for the university as there is a loss in revenue as fewer students graduating from the university. Also like Shafer, Lattimer does not provide any data about this measure of success.

### **The Data That Exists and The Data That Does Not Exist.**

When asked about measuring success in IDS, most participants cited multiple measures, but could not always identify specific data that support these measures. This was often true for

measures of quality of the thesis and student writing in general. For the data that do exist, the validity is often questionable for making large summations of the major. One source of questionable data is from the exit and follow-up surveys from the university that ask students about life post-college. Joe Kane is unwilling to rely on this measure as it has a low response rate. Kane cited the response rate as “15% to 25%” (Joe Kane, 2019). However, the campus career center cites an exit survey with a 37% response from 2018 graduates. No information is publicly available from the university regarding any data gathered about students after their graduation year.

In response to the lack of data the university collects, the IDS major started its own exit survey. The program ensured higher response rates from graduating students by requiring the survey as a graduation requirement. These survey responses were part of the Program Review in 2012.

I think the way for the review it was done was that they took the exit surveys of students, and whether they had a good time, happy time here or not, and whether they think they became stronger students, better thinkers, better writers, whether they thought the faculty were available for them. I think the university was surprised. I think they thought that the program may not have been up to standards, but even before Sam got here, the numbers were quite good, and they were good relative to other programs in [the College of Letters and Sciences]. (Joe Kane, 2019)

By collecting their own data, the IDS program ensured support for the program because they had evidence of their performance from the student perspective. It was only to the benefit of that program that their data was positive. Kane clarifies this is only one way to measure success:

You know, firstly, we don't have enough data, I think, to really measure it the way I would like to measure it, but the exit survey's important and those have tended to be favorable, both with the old faculty and the new faculty. (Joe Kane, 2019)

The exit survey only provides a single measure of success in the major, but multiple parties accept this single measure as a reliable source of information. However, this does not mean that all parties view the survey as a formal assessment. Sharon Braver does not identify the exit survey as an assessment because in her mind “an assessment would include an evaluation of whether the goals of the program are met” (Sharon Braver, 2019). Sharon Braver does not believe the exit survey is directly related to the goals of the program as stated on the public website.

Sharon Braver's discussion of programmatic goals points to another issue with data collection and assessment in IDS: there are no formal systems or rubrics for data collection and internal program assessment.

There's self assessments done in terms of the programs... That all majors have been asked to articulate their learning goals. Should be on the website, I think it is for IDS. And that's the standard that they are expected to be holding themselves, but there's no formal assessment process that happens on an annual basis to measure whether that's actually happening. (Sharon Braver, 2019)

Because there are no standards of assessment, there are not rubrics, and therefore no standards for data collection. If the program wanted to do an internal review, they would have to start by collecting data, as that is not part of the regular academic year. Sam Winters identifies the kind of data that would be helpful, but is not currently available: graduation rates; grand point

averages; and job placements. However, all that is currently available to the program is median earnings of IDS graduates.

As IDS lacks large quantitative data sets about their students, the program turns to qualitative measures of success. They call these measure their “student bios” on the website.

In my opinion, one of the main selling points for the major in terms or, you know, "What do you guys produce," right, would be the student bios, the student bio feature on our homepage, which essentially lists where some of our highest-performing students are, like Harvard grad school, they're in law school, medical school, doing research here and there, doing a Fulbright Fellowship, whatever. So, we have quite a few students on that feature, on the website. (Steve Lattimer, 2019).

This measure of success can also be defined as a marketing tool. This measure of success matches other forms of assessment in that there is a focus on career, high performers, and graduate school. It also self selects students who keep in touch with professors after graduating programs and gives an introduction to the program’s top students.

## **Conclusion**

The explanation of how Winters raised the standards of the majors across a variety of avenues (e.g., raising the standards for the thesis, ladder faculty leadership, institutionalization) speaks to each of the issues in this chapter. The Program Review Committee was concerned about the general rigor of the program. This was something that was revised as the program modified acceptable coursework, the application process, and the final thesis. Part of increasing the rigor of the program was to bring the program up to university standards. This process of institutionalization of the IDs major is a key process in developing a strong interdisciplinary program. A key aspect of institutionalization is following campus protocol regarding who can be

a director of a program. While this meant Camille Shafer could not longer head the program, Sam Winters' ladder faculty status in many ways elevated the IDS major to the level of disciplinary majors. This is simply because a ladder faculty member is director. It does not speak to the every day function of the major, but rather the ability to compare the major to disciplinary majors. Despite all of these changes, no changes were made to assessing the program and any changes made. The program has limited data sources to argue that the Winters changes made any measurable change in the program. The influence of other programs' perception of the IDS major is key to understanding what it means to increase the rigor of the program. When looking across all of these changes, it becomes clear that few of the changes in response to the Program Review regarded the content of the program itself. Rather, there was significant focus on the institutionalization of the program and making the program's administration match that of disciplinary majors.

## **Chapter 4: Fernham College**

Fernham College is a small all-women private college. When they were contacted to participate in this dissertation, IDS was under development. By the time data was collected from Fernham, IDS finished its first semester and was underway in the second semester. This chapter looks at the beginnings of a brand new IDS and what goes into developing this kind of major as well as the impetus to create such a major.

Only one interview was conducted at Fernham College. While many people were contact for interviews, they all referred to Mandy Pepperidge as the expert on IDS at Fernham, and declined to be interviewed. This was following several emails explaining the value of their perspective in data collection. The lack of participants is a limitation to this chapter. Mandy Pepperidge is physical chemist and joined the Fernham faculty in 2000. In 2017 Pepperidge was hired as the Associate Provost for Curriculum Development, and is contracted for another year and a half. She is currently discussing extending her position to three or more years. Pepperidge describes her decision to take on an administrative position as one based on duty to her small liberal arts college. She argues that in such a small community of faculty, it is her duty to step into administrative positions when the need arises with the understanding that it is a temporary assignment and she will eventually return to teaching. Pepperidge agreed to an interview in her capacity as the Associate Provost, however, she also brought her experiences as Department Head for Chemistry and time spent on various faculty committees for departments that are interdisciplinary in nature.

This chapter does not address issues of adjunct faculty and their relationship with the IDS major. Adjunct faculty was neither a subject of concern for the department, nor a significant one for the university. Pepperidge cites the faculty populations as approximately 60% tenure track

and 40% full time adjunct faculty. This number does not refer to 40% of the individuals, but rather combined positions to measure a single full time position. According to Pepperidge, this 40% is comprised of approximately 110 adjunct faculty. Pepperidge acknowledges this is a large adjunct population, but this number includes individuals who teach one course, once a year, such as their local assembly representative who teaches a course on state public policy. Pepperidge also points to an adjunct that has taught at Fernham either halftime or full time for over 30 years as well as adjunct who are hired to cover a single lab section.

### **The Development of an Interdisciplinary Studies Major**

IDS opened to students in Fall 2018, after significant preparation. IDS is part of a larger Degree Completion Program (DCP). In her discussion of IDS, Pepperidge often refers to the DCP as IDS is only available DCP students and is one of few options available to complete the program. Pepperidge cites the universities interest developing programs for underserved communities as the reason for the development of the program:

There was an interest in developing an adult learning, an adult degree completion program. That's something Fernham has not had. It's something that is, our sense is, and it's underserved in the market although it's a little hard to get the details on that.

Certainly, from the point of view of Fernham's mission around social justice and inclusion, the fact that there are a lot of people floating around who have part of a degree is an issue. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge's citation of the social justice mission of the university will come into play regarding who is involved in the DCP. Pepperidge argues that while interest in developing an adult learning program was floating around, there was not sufficient support to develop one based on



sentiment alone. For a small university to invest the time and resources into program development, they needed to know there was demand for a bachelor completion program.

It's become clear we just need better market research. We have been kind of operating for a long time and most academic institutions operate this way. You know, someone has an idea and they go out and they build it and they build a constituency for it and we put it in the catalog. Sometimes they work great, sometimes they don't work. It's just very scatter-shot and as the higher education market becomes more complicated, which is happening, the old ways in which we did that probably don't mesh up with the new market. [...] I am, and then some other folks in the provost's office, and also in admissions. So it's really a discussion between provost and admissions around what do we need to do, where's the market, what are we... we've done two cycles now of admissions, what did we find out about the students who were interested in this kind of program? How are we meeting their needs or not meeting their needs? What do we need to do to make it a more appealing product? (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Market research provides the argument that there are students who would be served by a DCP. This way Fernham is able to ensure there is a tuition-paying constituency for a new program before starting the planning process. Additionally, market research ensures the value of political capital spent in developing and building internal support for a DCP.

You know, because we don't want to build something and put a lot of effort into building it to have it... you don't want to spend a lot of time, money, and effort and faculty and political capital, because every time you build something that doesn't work, you lose a little bit of your ability to bring people along with you. So, we need to have a plan we

think is really viable before we make, to say what I think the next steps are going to be.

(Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Before the program was created and now before any significant changes are made to the program, it is important for there to be sufficient support external to the university before building internal support. Pepperidge, as well as others contributing DCP development are unwilling to risk their political capital and internal support for future projects if they cannot ensure the external support of the program. While the market research does not necessarily inform what the DCP looks like, it does inform the projected constituency of the program, and that in turn informs the requirements of the program.

Unlike other programs in this dissertation, there is a clear, somewhat documented history of the program. Additionally, the purpose of IDS (and DCP) is not rooted in an intellectual curiosity or desire to provide a broad liberal arts education that allows students to pursue their individual interests. Rather it is rooted in the desire to provide a college degree to an underserved population discovered through market research. While Pepperidge says there was internal interest in developing a DCP, the real substantive push was an external one. There was something outside of the university that called for the creation of such a program, and IDS is one way to fulfill that call.

### **The DCP and IDS Mechanics**

The Interdisciplinary Studies Major is part of the Degree Completion Program. The six participating majors in DCP are: IDS; Business Administration; English; Ethnic Studies; Politics, Economics, Policy and Law; and Sociology. IDS is the only major that is unavailable to traditional and traditional-transfer students. There is an individually designed major at Fernham

that resembles Mission University's IDS. However, that program is not discussed in this dissertation.

IDS became an option for DCP when Mandy Pepperidge and the committee developing DCP realized there was a need for more flexibility than a disciplinary major could provide. While all participating majors agreed to offer courses at times benefiting nontraditional students, there was concern this was not sufficient.

DCP students can currently choose from several majors including Business Administration, Sociology, PEPL, and Ethnic Studies. These programs have agreed to offer courses during evening and weekend times to serve this new population. However, we anticipate that some students will enter the program who cannot reasonably complete one of these four majors in an efficient manner, and will need a more flexible major in Interdisciplinary Studies.” (Program Proposal, 2018)

While, IDS appears to be provided for flexibility reasons, there are requirements that need to be met at Fernham that are separate from credits students may bring from other universities.

To complete the major, students must complete a minimum of 30 course credits at Fernham. The first set of Core Requirements includes taking two of the following methods or theory classes: Social Foundations of Education; Research Methods with Communities of Color, with Fieldwork; People and Organizations; and Methods of Social Research and Policy Development. The Education Department, Ethnic Studies, and Management offer these courses respectively, and Methods of Social Research and Policy Analysis are offered by Sociology and Public Policy. One argument for these theory courses is to ground students' theses in a theoretical perspective. Students then complete an additional 20 upper division credits in at least two disciplines in consultation with their advisor. Their senior year, students' senior theses are in

Ethnic Studies or Sociology. At the time of her interview, Mandy Pepperidge said there was discussion of developing a course for all DCP students to write their thesis in the same seminar class. The only other requirement is the “College 101” class that provides:

Exploration of aspects of information technology as they relate to liberal arts education. Students develop an understanding of the basic operations of computers and computer networks; an ability to search databases and the Internet as sources for reliable information; skill in evaluating resources; and an appreciation of ethical and legal issues related to the use of these technologies. (Fernham Academic Catalog)

Pepperidge cites this College 101 class as a way to potentially develop the program by having all DCP students in the same section. This would create a community of DCP students while providing the opportunity to assess prior knowledge. A shared IDS experience is something other programs without a common curriculum struggle to create. Unless IDS teaches an introduction to interdisciplinary theory, methods, or thesis course, IDS students may never knowingly take courses with other IDS majors.

### **Relationship with Other Departments: Departmental Missions as Partnership Catalyst**

The DCP and IDS work with other departments on campus for their building blocks. With the exception of IDS, the majors in the DCP exist outside of the program itself. They provide courses to all Fernham students. In addition to serving traditional students, they have agreed to offer courses at times that meet the needs of the non-traditional swirlers (Renn and Reason, 2012). The exception is IDS draws from a variety of majors on campus and is not restricted to those who designate themselves as participating in DCP.

## **IDS Has the Same Governance Structure as Other Interdisciplinary Majors**

Despite functioning differently than the other DCP majors, IDS has the same governance structure as other departments on campus that are interdisciplinary in nature. Pepperidge compares the structure of IDS to the Biochemistry major.

It also has, governance-wise, it also has a committee. So there are three faculty members, I believe, who are the interdisciplinary studies committee. And that's how we generally handle interdisciplinary majors. So it's not any different governance-wise than like the biochemistry major, which is biochemistry and molecular biology and is run by a program committee that consists of faculty in chemistry and biology. So we have lots of programs that are interdisciplinary, environmental studies, there's a bunch of them around campus. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge speaks of the IDS majors in conjunction with other interdisciplinary programs on campus. Interdisciplinarity is so accepted on this campus that there are systemic approaches to support its administration and development of rigorous programming (Augsburg and Henry, 2009). It therefore follows that a loose IDS for DCP was accepted based on the trust of faculty to guide undergraduates. The Fernham's faculty are already invested in interdisciplinarity and can be trusted to ensure its success. Pepperidge continues with how the IDS committee functions:

It has three faculty members, in business, sociology, and, I think, English, right now, but it can vary, who would be the people to propose changes to it, propose addendums, who would be responsible for editing it, when we update the catalog every year, they'd be responsible for checking on it and that kind of work. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge comments that people take turns sitting on interdisciplinary committees based on their interest and there is a fair amount of faculty movement between committees due to the size

of Fernham. Fernham's size is highlighted with individual faculty members sitting on multiple committees longer than a single term.

Typically, the official term is three years, but a lot of people serve multiple three-year terms. So, I've been on the environmental science committee for 18 years, you know, because there aren't very many of us and so someone might have to go off because they're on sabbatical and you find a replacement but basically people tend to just continue serving on program committees unless they've got a conflict or they become department head for something else and they don't feel they can serve and then they would find a replacement. [...] that is an issue and if you look at the number of programs we offer, almost every faculty member is on a program committee or is a department head, or program head or is on a program committee. Almost every single tenure track faculty member is there. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Because of Fernham's size, individual faculty invest significant administrative time into committee work that is often interdisciplinary in nature. Faculty members are almost forced to participate in activities that span disciplinary boundaries because of Fernham's size. This shared experience of working across disciplines supports the general sense of interdisciplinarity on campus. This subtle interdisciplinarity across campus is unique to Fernham when compared to other universities in this study.

This subtle interdisciplinarity and unobtrusive support of IDS and DCP speaks to the culture at Fernham. In addition to a supportive culture are supportive individuals who bring with them the political clout to develop internal support of new interdisciplinary programs at Fernham.

So they're generally supportive, with some exceptions. The sociology faculty, ethnic studies faculty, people who are very social-justice oriented, the people who are very social justice oriented. However, also it's a little complicated because the department head for sociology and the department head for ethnic studies are also both part of the provost office administration right now. So they are interested in it in kind of a bigger scheme. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge also cites the business school dean, the school of government, public policy, political science, and economics, and the dean of digital learning in English but not the entire English department. The English department has “a large MFA program and they take most of their upper level classes are also split. Their graduate and undergrad in the same room and so balancing all of those needs is a challenge” (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019). It is clear there is support for DCP and IDS across the university. And that support is from positions of power. Pepperidge hints at one potential additional reason for support: the overlap in duties. The heads of Sociology and Ethnic studies are part of the provost office developing DCP. This departmental support is driven not only by mission statements, but also by individuals who hold multiple positions of power within Fernham. It is not only a consortium of invested faculty, but also a consortium of invested administrators with interdisciplinary experience. This is the strong internal support along with the external support of market research enabled the development of DCP and IDS.

This political capital that enabled the development of the DCP and IDS is not invisible to Pepperidge. She acknowledges that all educational ventures split resources and force people to prioritize missions and goals.

And there is a lot of political capital, and you understand the sense in which I mean it, I mean it internal to the institution because if you want admissions to do A, that means

they have less time to do B. There's always going to be competing priorities and so you always have to bear in mind if you're bringing people along that they need to be persuaded that this is why we're doing it, this is why it's the right decision, this is what we're going to put behind it (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019).

This understanding of split priorities is why it is so powerful to have a unified internal and external motivation to develop a program such as DCP and IDS. The external support of market research helps to prioritize one internal project over others. It is because of this joint internal and external call for DCP, and in turn IDS, that the provosts office developed a program with investment from across the university.

### **Rigor In A New Program**

While there is internal and external support for the program, that did not necessitate a person aware of IDS best practices or how to develop a rigorous IDS curriculum. When Pepperidge began her tenure as the Associate Provost for Curriculum Development she was not aware of best practices in IDS, nor who was considered top programs in the field. However, Pepperidge did know of a university close by with a well-developed IDS: Eastern State University. She describes turning to their curriculum as a starting point.

The idea, the development behind it, or sort of the basic idea of 20 credits in at least two disciplines, some kind of a methods course, methods or theory course, was based on, largely on ESU's design. That was sort of where we started. If you want to make an argument to your faculty that this is something that is of reasonable quality, that's a good place to start. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge does not cite why ESU is a model program for Fernham. Rather, it is the rigor of the university itself that provides the clout for IDS, as an example of loose coupling (Cameron,



1984). The Fernham faculty are willing to accept whatever ESU does under the assumption that ESU follows best practices. This is a particularly striking example of isomorphism at Fernham (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The Fernham program is copied from another university while making adjustments to accommodate a largely transfer population who bring a significant number of transfer units with them.

In IDS development for DCP, Pepperidge and Fernham administrators were concerned about the possibility of transfer students looking for a way to use credits from other colleges as a way to quickly graduate without completing any coursework that engages the interdisciplinary nature of the program. There was a concern that students would use IDS as an opportunity to graduate quickly without an academically meaningful experience.

Typically, they don't care that much about what the degree is in, because they've already spent a lot of time and a lot of money and they just need to be able to put that stamp on something and move on with their lives. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge acknowledges that students attracted to the DCP are not looking for a traditional undergraduate, liberal arts, experience. Pepperidge sees the value in the flexibility in IDS and how it can serve students who are looking to “move on with their lives” while also providing an engaging undergraduate experience.

It became clear that one of the issues that we couldn't do, what no one can do, is when you do adult degree completion, is create your entire undergraduate daytime residential curriculum in evenings, weekends, online. It's too many courses. So you need to find a way to pare that down but at the same time, you need to find a way to serve those students who come in, especially because of the group that you're serving are what are sometimes called swirlers. They've swirled in and out of different schools and different

populations and they've gone to school for a while, dropped out for a while. And so you need a way to serve them efficiently. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

IDS provides the ability to apply as many transfer units as possible while also allowing students to take courses across departments that provide courses offered on weekends and evenings. IDS provides the opportunity to use campus courses offered at times best for nontraditional students without restricting students to the departments who have formally committed to DCP. While pursuing interests in areas outside of the allotted majors in DCP, IDS allows students to take courses across two majors that may individually not fulfill their academic interests nor offer enough coursework to complete the program in an accelerated manner.

### **Rigorous Coursework Copies Other IDS and Employs Fernham Standard Practices**

When discussing what makes a rigorous program at Fernham, Pepperidge was quick to point to their source material: Eastern State University. ESU provides a starting point for developing the IDS curriculum. This also provides the basis for which Pepperidge made an argument to the Fernham faculty about the curriculum's caliber. ESU has a model is important external marker of rigor for IDS. Part of developing a rigorous major was acknowledging the role of community swirlers, while also ensuring students engage academically. ESU was the source of some of these ideas.

So that's where some of these ideas came from, that it really was around upper division, that it was a major... it didn't need to be a lot of credits but it needed to have a core of upper division that was not just everything I took at the community college, trying to shoe horn it in, that you needed to have an opportunity. And, that this was most likely what they would complete at Fernham; because they only transfer... there are transfer

requirements. So they can only transfer in 66 credits from a community college on the assumption that, that's lower division. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019).

While students bring their credits with them, they only account for lower division requirements. Rather than taking transfer credits and forcing those classes into an existing program, the major limits how these credits can be used. Transfer credits can only be used as a foundation, rather than fulfilling all the requirements of the major. Pepperidge continues: “And so, the idea that most of what they were completing here should be upper division coursework that's a little more intensive, a little more, expecting more of them, not just cobbling together survey courses” (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019). The program needs to provide the opportunity for students to complete upper division coursework that compliments their credits compiled from other programs. By choosing the kind of coursework included in the 20 upper division credits the faculty involved in IDS control the rigor of individual students programs.

Beyond ESU's programming, the rationale behind the curricular requirements is rooted in making a program that fits into Fernham's standard practices. All Fernham students are required to write a senior thesis. Part of this process was the requirement for students to take theory or methods courses:

Senior seminars at Fernham, it always involves writing a senior thesis, so its taking a... and that's part of why we thought they needed some kind of a theory course, because you need to have that to be able to come up with a question that you're going to investigate as part of your senior thesis. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

The thesis alone is not sufficient to meet the Fernham theses standards of Fernham. Fernham has standards of practice that include thesis preparation in the form of methods and theory training.

In the case of IDS and DCP, the thesis is expected to be social science research. This expectation is based largely on the participating departments in DCP and the lack of humanities represented.

For Fernham, rigorous coursework is not just about aligning Fernham with a top university. While this is an important argument for Pepperidge to make, curricula are not considered rigorous until it aligns with Fernham's native designations of rigorous programming. By aligning with university standard practices, IDS establishes itself as a respected program on campus on par with other disciplinary programs and ESU's IDS.

### **Assessments Are Under Development**

IDS and the broader DCP are in their infancy, with multiple aspects still under development. One of those areas is assessment of the major and the broader degree-granting program. While no clear assessments of rigor or success in the program are established, Pepperidge speaks to how IDS will measure success in the future. She caveats her discussion of IDS in that its future is still unclear. Because it is expected to be a small program, it is easier for her to discuss assessment at the level of DCP. This lack of individual assessment plan highlights a potential secondary status of IDS compared to other programs on campus. Rather than having measures of success related to its own goals, IDS is grouped into their umbrella organization. This can cause potentially problems for IDS when they are asked to demonstrate their value and success if they cannot disaggregate their measures of success from DCP.

One example of the conflation of IDS goals with DCP goals is the ability to establish a baseline assessment of students. Because the DCP accepts students with a wide variety of academic experiences, Fernham wants to establish a baseline to later gauge success of the program and student growth. The goal is to accomplish this in a writing course.

In terms of the DCP, the other place we'll probably do assessment, which is a little broader question than the interdisciplinary studies, is one of the things that we were developing is a course that we called College 101, which is kind of a writing course for that population but also a place to do assessment of prior learning. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

When asked questions about IDS, Pepperidge often rephrased the question in a way that primarily focused on DCP. While the conflation of the two measures of success and measures of prior learning is concerning for demonstrating the value of the program in the future, it does fit well with the standard practices of the university. The university requires a senior thesis. To establish a rigorous program, DCP and IDS require a writing course that establishes teaches students the mechanics of interdisciplinary writing and research as well as establish a baseline for writing and assess previous student learning.

When she discusses potential assessment for IDS, Pepperidge first caveats her experience in assessment and then imagines where assessment may take place.

Assessment is not my bailiwick, to be clear. So, but eventually, you start to have to look at what are the goals of the program? Are we meeting the goals? How do we assess those? Presumably, we will do the assessment in senior seminar as much as possible.

(Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

Pepperidge focuses on the senior thesis requirement, associated with the senior seminar, as a key indicator of rigor by ESU and Fernham. While it is clear Pepperidge knows where she wants to assess students and the program, it is not clear what she is assessing or how she will accomplish this assessment. Her discussion remains focused on what the goals of an assessment might be, she does not appear to have an idea of what the goals of IDS. This lack of focus may provide

complications for IDS in the future if there are no firmly established programmatic goals and are unable to assess completion of those goals.

Pepperidge also discusses the potential hurdles any assessment of IDS may face. Specifically how the interdisciplinary nature of IDS creates obstacles to designing a unified experience that can be assessed at the programmatic level. In her discussion of IDS assessment, Pepperidge begins to express ideas of potential IDS goals.

The problem with interdisciplinary studies is the students distribute themselves widely and so you really need a place to bring them back together, which will probably be the senior seminar. So, I would imagine we're going to look at, can you bring multiple disciplinary lenses. (Mandy Pepperidge, 2019)

An identifying aspect of IDS is the ability to take courses across the university. This also poses problems for assessing the program, as there are few times IDS students interact with each other. Pepperidge also mentions another difficulty in assessing interdisciplinary work: the distribution of students across disciplines. Assessment cannot include a student's grasp of a single disciplinary tradition. Rather, an assessment needs to be grounded in the interdisciplinary tradition. Pepperidge's suggestion of integrating multiple disciplinary lenses follows this tradition. While Pepperidge has begun to think about assessment for IDS, it is clear that these ideas are still under development and much will need to be considered as IDS continues to admit students.

## **Conclusion**

Despite bringing the interview back to IDS over and over again. It was clear IDS was not as large of a priority as the rest of the DCP for Pepperidge. Additionally the other committee members involved in the development of IDS were unwilling to meet with me and redirected my

interview request to Pepperidge. Pepperidge in turn focuses on developing the broader DCP after establishing the curriculum for IDS. This speaks to Pepperidge's comment about program creation and development as a political activity and to her need to balance multiple priorities. After fulfilling an obligation to complete one aspect of DCP, she turns her attention away from IDS to other aspects of DCP. IDS is no longer at the forefront of her priorities and is now only considered when discussed with the broader DCP.

These discussions that conflate the needs of IDS with DCP highlight the primary role of both programs: serve swirling students in Fernham's extended community. Discussions of curriculum, university policy, and the intersection of the two in discussions of rigor return to how to best serve swirling students and help them complete their bachelor's degree. At the time of data collection there was no means of measuring how well the programs served students (nor did there appear to be plans for assessment), it was clear this would be their primary concern when evaluating the success of DCP and IDS.

The creation and development of IDS centered on the desire to serve a very specific community while maintaining academic rigor both from potential external reviews as well as internal ones. A glaring exception being the lack of planned assessment. Excluding this issue, Pepperidge and her committee take care to ensure IDS was a respected program by external standards as well as internal ones. The external standards of rigor established by ESU were a starting point to establish a rigorous program. The key step in development beyond this was ensuring the institutionalization of IDS by ensuring it followed standard practices for all majors.

This small, developing program, may find itself in a position for significant growth. This is partially due to the general support for interdisciplinarity on campus. Fernham is home to many programs that are interdisciplinary in nature. These programs are well respected and well

supported in that they have active committees, tenure track faculty, and full enrollments.

Interdisciplinary work is present and well known on campus, even if it does not exist as IDS available to all Fernham students. While IDS may not be expanded and open to all students, there may be more disciplinary departments who take active roles in the development and oversight of the major.

IDS has laid the foundation of a sustainable program that follows best practices at Fernham and aligns itself with the ESU curriculum. These are two important steps in supporting the rigor of the program. However, the program's sustainability is not as strong when the size and visibility of the program is considered. Pepperidge constantly conflates IDS with DCP. Without a singular identity, it is hard to make an argument for the unique intellectual value of the program if the program cannot be identified. The small footprint can protect a program by avoiding the politics of larger programs. However, small programs are easily forgotten. If Fernham were forced to make significant budget cuts, it is much easier to cut a small program than a large one that cannot make an argument for the added student services.



## **Chapter 5: Mission University**

Mission University is a large doctoral university with very high research activity (R1) and a current population of 23,070 undergraduate students and 2,906 graduate students (2018-2019 Campus Profile from Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment). The IDS major is housed within the Division of Undergraduate Education in the College of Letters and Science. At the same level as Division of Undergraduate Education are the Divisions of: Mathematical, Life, and Physical Sciences; Social Science; and Humanities and Fine Arts. The Division of Undergraduate Education houses academic advising, the honors program, pre-professional advising, as well as other academic initiatives such as IDS and a first-year seminar program. Tenure track faculty members from across disciplines serve as associate deans for each of these academic initiatives. IDS is housed in this wide-ranging division filled predominately with non-degree granting programs. The person in charge of the IDS Major, Julian Eaves, is an academic advisor who also oversees the Individual Major, Pre-Health Program, Scholarships, Honors Program, and Accelerated Study Access Program.

Eaves' responsibilities are more extensive than just the IDS major. This speaks to the size of the major; it is small enough to not need a dedicated administrator. Additionally, it speaks to the position of the major at the university where it can be easily grouped into a division that shares the goal of undergraduate education.

Before a deeper discussion of the IDS major, a quick discussion of the Individualized Major is worth noting as Eaves was unsure if the Individual Major or IDS is a better fit for the dissertation. A student develops the Mission University's Individual Major in conjunction with two tenure track faculty members. With a base admission of 3.2 GPA, students must make a written argument for their major that includes a planned course of study approved by the Letters

and Science Executive Committee. The proposal must include: Title of Major; General Description of the Major; Scholarly Objective of the Major; Preparation for the Major; Upper Division Major; Student Learning Outcomes; Faculty Advisor's Statement; and Endorsement from second faculty member. If the Letters and Science Executive Committee accepts the major, the student must complete their plan of study and a senior thesis.

### **Interdisciplinary Studies Major Requirements**

IDS is similar to the Individual Major, but requires less student preparation. However, the most stringent criteria of the program is that it is not for students attempting to “pull something together” or looking to change their major in the senior year (Mission University Course Catalog). IDS is open to all students with at least a 2.0 GPA. Working in conjunction with Eaves, potential IDS students develop a two or three page major proposal that conveys: the central theme of the major; the educational goals of the major; the objective of the major (defined in terms of intellectual not vocational terms); and the student learning outcomes for the major (Mission University Course Catalog). The major proposal should also include planned courses, included the required coursework for each of the three departments included in the major. Students must also provide a tentative title to their senior project to be completed in one of the disciplinary departments.

Unique to IDS at Mission University are the departmental requirements. Mission University's IDS requires students to declare three contributing disciplinary departments. Within each of those departments there are required courses for IDS students. These requirements are short of the requirements to declare a Minor in the disciplinary department, but enough to learn the assumptions and tenets of the discipline. These requirements are divided between Preparatory (lower division) courses and Upper Division courses. The senior thesis coursework is completed

in one of the three disciplinary departments, though it is unclear how students choose which department to complete this requirement. While all departments have required Preparatory courses, Upper Division requirements vary by department. Some departments have no requirements, some departments have required courses, other departments have a required number of units but no specific courses, some departments have a required number of units and a list of courses that cannot count towards required units. Based on the interview with Eaves, it does not appear that students chose departments based on required coursework.

### **Programmatic History and Future**

IDS does not have a well-documented history at Mission University. Eaves provides information that was passed on to him, but any verification of his information would require significant document analysis of course catalogs, notes from faculty senate meetings, and interviews with retired faculty. This work was not included in this dissertation but may be completed in the future. For this dissertation, Eaves' account provides the historical context for the current IDS program. Eaves provides his own caveat that much of the historical context that accounts for what the program looks like was established before he started with Mission University in 2010. This is one of the greatest limitations of this dissertation. However, the specifics of this limitation speak to how IDS functions at Mission. IDS remains under the radar of large governance oversight groups and therefore is not well documented.

The current IDS major grew out of a program called Liberal Studies. In the late 1980s the Mission University faculty decided that Liberal Studies was “far too liberal, and there wasn’t enough shape [...] a path of least resistance kind of major” (Eaves, 2019). There was some concern that students were using Liberal Studies to avoid preparatory courses. This is why IDS currently requires students to take specific preparatory courses in each disciplinary department.

The requirements of the current IDS are reactions to the previous Liberal Studies Major. The way the current IDS is written in the course catalog fixates on meeting disciplinary guidelines and purposefully developing a course of study with an intellectual focus rather than a vocational one.

Eaves does not anticipate any changes in the major, significant or minor. He also does not anticipate a growth in the number of students currently declared (eleven students have declared the IDS major since 2012). The stability of the major is due to two things: university leadership and faculty support. The current Dean for the Division of Undergraduate Education is pleased with the current major. Eaves compared the current Dean's attitude towards the major with that of the previous Dean:

I think that the previous dean was, one of the previous deans was kind of reacting to this concerns about the rigor of it. I think [the current dean] is less concerned. And I don't want to say this incorrectly. It's not that he's not concerned about the rigor. But I think he's a little bit more encouraging. I think he finds these students who want to do interdisciplinary studies interesting and he appreciates that they're doing something that the typical student isn't happy to do. They're creating their own path. And I think he's intrigued. I think he's charmed by that, in a way, that I think the previous regime wasn't so much. (Eaves, 2019)

The concerns about the Liberal Studies Major have not carried over to the administration of the Interdisciplinary Studies Major. Rather than expressing concern, the current Dean supports the flexibility of the major. The Dean approves all IDS applications. Eaves claims the Dean has approved all applications and has been excited by the original research proposed by each student.

Beyond the Dean, the Chancellor provides support through stability. The current Chancellor has held the position for 25 years (Mission University Website). Eaves cites the length of the Chancellor's tenure as providing stability for IDS and the whole Mission University.

Part of why that is, is that [university] administratively; Chancellor [name] has been here.... just a remarkable length of time. [...] He's going strong. There's no sign that he's going to leave. But as long as ... I don't think there's going to be much change. I would not expect it to change much as long as he is here. I wouldn't. If we would get a new chancellor some time in the next few years for whatever reason, I think all bets are off. I think a lot of what we do could change, including this program. But based on the current administration, I would say this is pretty stable. (Julian Eaves, 2019)

Eaves never expressed any desire to change the program, in any way. The faculty, administration, and students were happy with the current IDS. After the programmatic changes from the 1980s, equilibrium was reached and has been maintained for decades. The stability of the program may change with a new Chancellor, but for the time being the current administration, at all levels, is pleased with IDS.

### **Adjuncts and Advisors: Who Runs and Staffs IDS**

Other universities have the issue of adjunct faculty teaching and running IDS. For Mission University, there are no adjuncts running the program. Rather it is a staff position in the advising office. Much like other IDS included in this dissertation, there is minimal tenure track faculty oversight. While Eaves holds a PhD, he is not hired as a faculty member. He serves as an academic advisor who oversees multiple programs. As seen in a previous quote, Eaves answers directly to the Dean of Undergraduate Education. This is a relationship built on trust. Eaves'

description of his relationship with the dean (as per the previous section) is one where the Dean trusts Eaves to develop IDS proposals with students. These proposals are rigorous as they integrate disciplines beyond a double major. The Dean trusts Eaves to ensure students are prepared for IDS. The Dean is comfortable taking a hands-off approach because he trusts Eaves to ensure the quality of incoming IDS students. Aside from the Dean and Eaves, there is no significant faculty oversight of the program. Tenure track faculty developed the course requirements from each discipline. However, these requirements do not include ongoing oversight of IDS. The course requirements provide passive oversight. All checks on the program center on Eaves and his judgment.

Unlike other IDS, there are no adjunct faculty involved in the major. This is not due to a choice made by the program, but rather part of the culture of Mission University. There are teaching faculty at Mission University referred to as Lecturers with Security of Employment (LSOE). Lecturers who are not LSOEs have their own union. Mission University does not have “freeway fliers who are moving between here and [the] City College or something like that” (Eaves, 2019). For the lecturers on campus, the “population is pretty secure. Another thing that makes Mission University really interesting is that we have relatively few graduate students. We only have about two or three thousand graduate students” (Eaves, 2019). Part of the culture of lecturing faculty at Mission University is their inability to rely on graduate students as lecturers and teaching assistants. In general, Mission University does not rely on temporary teaching staff, but rather invests in ongoing lecturing faculty.

### **Rigor Establishing and Maintained through Requirements**

Rigor for IDS is built into the process of becoming an IDS major. All measures to ensure a rigorous IDS program are part of the application process. Coursework requirements were

established before any current student applied to the program. Additionally, the application itself guarantees a caliber of student who can perform at the level necessary to complete an IDS degree. Finally, a key aspect of the application is working one-on-one with Eaves. In these meetings Eaves is able to ascertain the academic ability of the students as well as their goals for pursuing an IDS degree and if those goals align with the goals of IDS. Each of these components of the application process is key to establishing rigorous programming on an individual and ongoing basis.

### **IDS Rigor is Established in the Disciplines**

IDS is available only to students in the College of Letters and Science. The major functions due to cooperation with the disciplined majors in the College of Letters and Science. The major requires students to take courses in the disciplines, both upper division and lower division, and fulfill the thesis requirement in a disciplinary department. At a superficial level, the disciplines oversee IDS rigor by ensuring the rigor of their courses, as it is their purview to ensure rigorous programming within their own department. The disciplinary departments, not IDS, design the IDS disciplinary course requirements. The disciplinary departments control what is considered necessary to be sufficiently trained in the major for undergraduate research in that field. They determine the fundamental theories, methods, and literature necessary for IDS students. Eaves could not provide any information about how the relationship with the disciplinary departments was formed, nor the process of putting together the required courses. However, it is clear that the IDS program relies on the disciplinary departments to manage and maintain the rigor of their own programming for the rigor of the IDS program.

## **IDS Rigor Preserved in the Application Process**

The application for IDS requires significant thought from the student in conjunction with Eaves to develop a proposal that makes a succinct argument to the Dean. The mentality is “We’re going to really look at this and tear about this and this. And this student needs to justify why they’re doing this major” (Eaves, 2019). After completing a significant number of lower division units, students declare in IDS. While students will usually wait until reaching upper division standing, it is recommended they start working with Eaves as soon as possible, preferably by sophomore year.

Part of the compelling argument students are expected to make is why a double major or a combination of majors and minors cannot fulfill the student’s goals. IDS refers to this as “thematic coherence.” The thematic coherence of the major is the heart of the IDS application. It is at the core of the coursework students propose. It is the source of the thesis that provides the capstone to the major. The thematic coherence of the program is at the core of approved proposals. Along with the Dean, the chairs of the contributing disciplinary departments approve the proposal. The thematic coherence of the proposal is how students argue that taking courses in a disciplinary environment is not sufficient to complete their academic goals.

## **IDS Rigor is Embedded in Identity**

Eaves takes a firm stance on what the major is, and what it is not. It is a place for students to pursue individual interests that cannot be integrated as a double major or major with minors. It is not a place for people looking to avoid departmental requirements or advance pre-professional interests. These two goals are antithetical to the College of Letters and Science’s mission as it is a liberal arts institution. By ensuring students and their academic goals match that of the major,



Eaves ensures the ongoing rigor of the program. The program is unbending to changing tides student demands, it holds fast in what it is and how it achieves its goals.

To accomplish hold fast to the IDS identity and achieve its mission, it is clear to students that the major is not something that can be put together at the last minute. It is also not a Refugee Major: a major students to turn when their first choice major is no longer an option.

So some of the students I talk to are trying to see interdisciplinary studies as a refugee major. "I didn't get the G.P.A. that I needed econ, in my econ courses, but I still want to be able to take econ courses. I want to do interdisciplinary studies instead." And that again, becomes the end of the discussion. I mean we could talk about other sorts of things, but this is not a way to get around the rest of the requirements the departments have. (Eaves, 2019)

Seeking IDS as a Refugee Major is a non-starter if it means avoiding departmental requirements. If a student has interests in a particular department, the courses that students often struggle with are the ones required in the departmental requirements for IDS. IDS maintains its rigor by ensuring students cannot avoid difficult disciplinary coursework. Using Eaves' example, if a student is unable to complete the requirements for the economics major, they cannot declare IDS and design an Economics-Light Major.

Another way Eaves identifies students who are seeking IDS as a Refugee Major are those who have "buyers remorse" (Eaves, 2019). These are students who have declared in a disciplinary major and have now realized it is not what they expected, or intended, to study. The declared program is no longer the right program for the individual student.

I guess the next most common time would be somewhere late sophomore year into early junior year where students are, kind of have this sort of [...] It can be sometimes almost

buyer's remorse about a particular major that's not what they thought it was. And they wonder if interdisciplinary studies would be something else. (Eaves, 2019)

Eaves does not say that these students are inherently bad fits for IDS. However, he does caution about using IDS as a Refugee from a previous poor decision. Students who are looking for an alternative to an academic choice they made earlier in their college career may not find a home in IDS.

As part of its mission as a liberal arts college, Mission University does not have a business college. It also does not have pre-professional majors such as an explicitly pre-law track, though Eaves cited law school as a common step for students after graduating from IDS. Eaves described his conversations with students who want to pursue business and think IDS is the means to achieve their goal:

I'll have a conversation with many students and one very typical one is, they'll come in and say, "I want to do interdisciplinary studies." I say, "That's interesting. Why do you want to do interdisciplinary studies?" "Because I want to go into business, and Mission University doesn't have a business major." And that's virtually a nonstarter... because we are a Liberal Arts College. We do not offer pre-professional programs and this is not ... interdisciplinary studies is not a vocational program. (Eaves, 2019)

Eaves and the language of the IDS Information Sheet insist that IDS programs of study have intellectual merit that is academic, not vocational. Eaves' tone when describing IDS as fulfilling a Liberal Arts College goal rather than a vocational program was one of exasperation. He was irked that students assumed he was the gatekeeper to a program that allows them to circumvent the goals of the college and program. Despite his tone, Eaves describes working with students to help them achieve their goals while maintaining the rigor of the IDS program. He does this by

redirecting student's vocational interests into ones rooted in liberal arts education. He gave an explanatory scenario of an unsuccessful conversation about pursuing a business-focused IDS:

And so then sometimes, I'll have conversations with them and I'll say, "Well, that's not possible. But if you're interested in studying the way organizations work, I mean," ... One model is ... One model I've talked to students about. I haven't had anybody who's actually done it yet, but talking about more related to organizational studies. You could do psychology and linguistics and another department, or something like that. And I can tell you, usually within about two or three minutes where they start to glaze over, "Well I want to do business." That's not what they're interested in. And so that ends. (Eaves, 2019)

Eaves is willing to work with students who are interested in working within the system of the IDS major. Students who are willing to take their interest in business and restructure it with a less vocational focus fit within the standards of the major. However, students who are unwilling to look at their interests through an interdisciplinary lens are unwelcome in the major. Eaves did not express concern about not having enough students in the major, and was quite comfortable turning students away who did not match the program's goals. IDS is small enough that it does not function like other disciplinary programs that need students declared to bring in tuition dollars to run properly. Without the need for "butts in seats," Eaves can turn students away who are not the proper fit for IDS and therefore maintain the rigor of the program. By not shifting the program to bend to the will of individual students, Eaves maintains the rigor of the program for students who wish to do interdisciplinary research.

This overarching strict adherence to the requirements and goals of the IDS program is part of IDS making a clear distinction between the current program and the Liberal Studies

Major of the 1980s. Eaves explicitly cites the Liberal Studies Major as lacking rigor according to the faculty senate and the need to build significant structure into the program.

And I think part of this was the legacy of the Liberal Studies Major and being where they wanted to build some rigor in. And there had been pressure on this office from the Senate to kind of rein in this major. (Eaves, 2019)

The Liberal Studies Majors was seen as explicitly lacking rigor. It was far too flexible in accepting students and their proposals. IDS is distinctly different. It is relatively inflexible in its requirements. It has high standards for the students it accepts, their academic goals, and how they plan to achieve them. Part of the rigor of IDS is based on its identity: what the program is and what it is not. Often, the program can cite what it is not, stronger than it can define what it is. Most of this identity in the negative comes from wanting to create a clear distinction from the Liberal Studies Major that lacked in rigor according to the administration.

### **No Formal Assessments of the Major But Other Measures of Success and Rigor**

There is no formal assessment of IDS. Eaves claims this is because the program is small. He does not explain if it is too small for regular review; if it is so small the governing body did not care to take the time to review; or if there were informal assessments that are better suited for a small major. Regardless, there are no formal assessments in place to evaluate the program. Despite a lack of formal assessment, Teri described IDS students as successful:

They put together majors that I think are academically rigorous, that have ... They have to, more than any other students on campus, they have to be able to have an understanding of what they're doing and why they're doing it. And they seem to do that. So yeah, I think it is successful. (Eaves, 2019)

What Eaves describes is the application process. For him, a student who develops an approved major proposal is by definition successful. Part of the success of individual students is tied to the intellectual integrity of the proposal. The ability to explain why the student has chosen a specific area to study and how they plan to study that concentration is a key measure of a student's success: can they articulate why their studies matter.

When asked how the major measures success in lieu of formal assessments, Eaves cites a recent victory for IDS with acknowledging honors students within their ranks. He explains:

Typically, for students who do honors at a regular major at Mission do a senior thesis. And if they have a 3.5 G.P.A., they qualify for departmental honors. [...] And the Dean looked at it and said, "Well, these students are all doing a senior thesis. They're doing a senior project. And almost all of them have at least a 3.5." (Eaves, 2019)

All IDS students are half way to completing the requirements for honors designation. With the potential of acknowledging honors students within their majors, IDS is on par with any disciplinary major. It can recognize the students who achieve advanced academic achievement. While the ability to present honors is a measure of success for students, it is also a measure of success for the major as it elevates IDS to the same level as disciplinary majors (Klein, 1990).

Another way the program measures success is what students do after they graduate. This discussion is often part of the application process. For students who express interest in graduate school, Eaves often suggests that IDS is not the right major for them because it does not provide the disciplinary grounding many graduate programs look for in applicants. Despite this concern, Eaves still considers the number of attend law school as a success and believes law school is a common step after Mission University for IDS students.

### **Relationship with Other Departments: No Challenges to Power**

IDS is unlike other majors in the College of Letters and Science as there is such a significant size difference, and there is no expressed interest in growing the major. This is the first of multiple ways IDS does not compete for students with other majors. Because the major is not looking to grow, it is not recruiting students who would otherwise declare as a different major. As students look at different majors to declare, IDS does not directly compete with other majors as the model and application process is much more involved than a traditional disciplinary major. Rather, IDS actively turns away students that will eventually declare in disciplinary departments in the College of Letters and Science. One explanation for why IDS is not looking to grow is because there is no bandwidth for the program to grow: “it would be very difficult to us to scale up at all and add more students without really ... This can't be just a one person operation. We would have to do something more with it if we did” (Eaves, 2019). Eaves oversees multiple programs as an advisor, and the office that houses IDS already manages multiple programs. As Eaves expressed: “The individual major and the interdisciplinary studies major are just a very small part of what we do in addition to advising” (Eaves, 2019). With the major as just one responsibility for the advising office, there is little bandwidth to grow the program, even if there was interest as the whole program is managed by one person with multiple responsibilities.

IDS has close ties with other programs because it relies on disciplinary departments to provide coursework for students. The details of disciplinary requirement development for IDS is not clear, but the requirements points to at least one period in time where IDS worked with each disciplinary department in the College of Letters and Science to develop the requirements. The program has a strong enough relationship with IDS that after establishing the requirements there

does not appear to have been any maintenance to the relationship between IDS and disciplinary departments.

Beyond the disciplinary requirements, IDS works in collaboration with disciplinary programs to list additional courses for those majors. While IDS does not teach courses, it does have courses listed in the course catalog. This designation is in collaboration with the disciplinary departments when they need additional sections for a course. Eaves explains:

So for example, the English department has a magazine. And students can sign up for it as an English course, but there's also an IDS course that they can study to be part of this magazine. And I'm not quite sure why that is, but I suspect it has something to do with they wanted their students to get more units for taking this course and they had maxed out on the number that they could do under that English designation, so they asked us, "Hey, could we create this course?" And we said, "Sure. That's fine." (Eaves, 2019)

In addition to providing courses for other majors, the IDS course distinction is used for Freshmen Seminar courses taught by faculty from across the College of Letters and Science. Faculty are not paid to teach these courses but are given a stipend. IDS has an amenable relationship with other departments using their course designation. This friendly relationship is part of why there is no sense of competition between departments.

## **Conclusion**

The current arrangement of IDS is a response to the long closed Liberal Studies Major at Mission University. Now IDS is a small, tightly controlled major, in response to the large wide-ranging Liberal Studies Major. The policy and curricular changes that made this change took effect decades ago. The changes themselves were built directly into the system in a way that they are now woven in seamlessly (Klein, 1990). Rigor is an inherent part of the IDS major and

cannot be avoided. Part of this streamlined rigorous program is the effect it has on controlling the size of the program. With the IDS major, there is no room for irregularities that would jeopardize the rigor of the program.

As a smaller, streamlined program, IDS stabilized into a small program that is managed by one person. The program became so stable that the one person has other responsibilities. With this level of stabilization, the program is almost an afterthought. It does not require constant observation, recalibration, and evaluation. Rather, it almost runs on its own, waiting for students to apply. This level of stability makes the program almost invisible. This is good because it does not respond to yearly changes to budgets and can fly under the radar if necessary. Because it is such a small program it is easily forgotten. This can become a negative in the future. A new Chancellor at Mission University may want to make significant changes to the College of Letters and Science. If so, it is hard to make an argument for a program that only sees eleven students in seven years. Mission University's IDS is currently stable with few threats. It does not foresee any significant changes in the future or threats to its existence in its current form.



## **Chapter 6: Greendale College**

Greendale College is a small M2 university currently facing significant financial instability. Facing significant budget and staffing cuts, the IDS major at Greendale developed relationships with neighboring programs to build the university's impression of the program. However, this work has entirely been done by the Director of the IDS Major as the rest of the major is delivered by adjunct faculty who are unaware of how the IDS major functions within the rest of the university. Adjunct interactions with the major and the university are limited to teaching courses. The current Director, Abed Nadir, provides an explanation of the IDS' position at Greendale succinctly:

But in a smaller university there is a larger burden borne by almost every individual because a smaller university has all of those same needs that a larger university has in terms of its functioning with fewer people and fewer resources for those people. I think it's a given of a smaller university, so if you're going to be here, you need to accept some of those dimensions, I think, and try to live with that. Though it's not always easy. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Greendale's size is an ongoing issue with how it addresses stresses external to the university, explicitly financial ones. While it is a small school, Greendale is large enough that making significant changes and seeing their results is a slow process.

IDS faces the same advantages and disadvantages as other disciplinary programs at Greendale, in that they are "on the same footing in terms of how [...] it received funding." IDS holds the same amount of institutional power as any disciplinary major in the College of Liberal Arts, but without the overhead associated with tenured faculty lines.

Greendale's IDS major is housed in the College of Liberal Arts. It reports directly to the Dean like other academic programs in the College. Greendale has a professional focus. At the same level of governance as the College of Liberal Arts are the Business School, the Architecture School, and the Media Culture & Design School. The College of Liberal Arts has had multiple names and iterations under various deans, but it has always been the IDS home. Jeff Winger was the first director and Abed Nadir is the second director of the program in its current form. Between these two directors, the program developed into its current form. All programmatic changes and assessments of the major go through the director. Greendale's IDS is characterized by strong leadership just as much as it is characterized by the size of the university.

The program as it currently stands has students fulfill university requirements, an Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies Course, Research Methods Course, Senior Thesis Preparation Course; Internship; and a Senior Thesis Course for the execution of the thesis. Courses in the two contributing disciplines are required as well, but the specifics of the course plan are developed in conjunction with Abed Nadir and individual students. As hurdles arise with each individual student, Nadir approaches each department and ensures their willingness to work with IDS. For example, a student wants to take a very specific course in a disciplinary major. However, that course had specific requirements the student had not completed. Nadir negotiated with the department to allow him to teach an independent study course with the student to cover the prerequisite materials. Nadir developed a strong relationship with each individual major that he is allowed to teach independent study courses in almost every College of Liberal Arts discipline.

The financial instability at Greendale highlights the three themes of this dissertation. The external pressures and how they trickled down into internal pressures affect how IDS interactions

with other departments, specifically on their reliance on Nadir to build those relationships rather than a more systemic approach to bridge building. Due to the limitations of the program based on the slashed budget, Nadir develops measures of rigor himself. The Program Review that should have been completed years ago was only recently completed because there was only one tenure track faculty member to collect the data necessary for the review. Finally, discussions of adjunct labor are rooted in cost-cutting measures. Adjuncts were part of the faculty before the financial crises, but have become a significant part of the workforce post financial crises. The financial crises put additional stress on IDS to perform with fewer resources. This pressure highlights how IDS functions within and interacts with the university.

### **The Source of Organizational Change: Financial Instability**

The IDS program did not experience significant change in isolation. Rather, all of Greendale faced significant financial instability and implemented austerity measures to ensure the survival of the university. To understand how the IDS major functions within the university, it is imperative to understand the financial situation at Greendale. It was difficult to obtain a full account of the financial crisis at Greendale. The majority of the story comes from Abed Nadir and Jeff Winger. Technically there are no tenure track professors at Greendale, all professors are on contracts. However, there are professors and then adjunct faculty. For continuity I will refer to the professors with professional protections and are allotted sabbaticals “tenure” professors. There are two tenure track faculty members directly associated with the IDS. Abed Nadir is the IDS director. He first came to Greendale in 2001 as an adjunct professor and became the program director in 2010. The director IDS must be tenure track faculty, but it is unclear when in the timeline Nadir shifted from adjunct to tenure track. Jeff Winger was the IDS director prior to Nadir and former Dean of College of Liberal Arts. At the time of his interview he was on

sabbatical with plans to return to the College of Liberal Arts as a tenure track professor with joint appointments across multiple departments. The other tenure track professor (Dean Pelton) interviewed for the dissertation was the head of a program in the College of Liberal Arts and the chair of the Faculty for Educational Planning, the internal Western Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation body. He spoke to the financial instability, but broadly across the university rather than specifically about IDS.

Abed Nadir describes a yearly budgeting process devoid of logic or structure. The academic year would begin in August, but Deans would not receive their yearly budgets until October. The current president took his position in the 2014-15 academic year. This president took a deep look into the financial standing of the institution. Rather than discovering that the institution was in the “black and balanced” the university was spending more money than they were making. The discrepancy was large enough if they were to “continue on that same pathway, [they] would have run out [their] endowment in about six years” (Nadir, 2019). Jeff Winger believes the financial instability is rooted in the financial crisis of 2008. Winger argues that post-recession years are good for Greendale’s enrollment because state universities have no budget. Greendale primarily competes with the local state university. When that state institution is under its own austerity measures because of a recession, and a decline in tax revenue, [Greendale gets] a lot of students who come to us. And so [Greendale saw] enrollments grow. It's always kind of a delayed wave effect, right? The recession happens in 2008-2009, and it used to be [local state university] starts putting in its measures, and so like two to three years later we start to see a big bump in enrollment. (Jeff Winger, 2019) Winger argues the leadership at the time did not understand the increase in enrollment was cyclical and economically driven rather than genuine growth. When “the economy rebounded,

and the state started funding the [local state university] more fully [Greendale] started bleeding students” (Winger, 2019). As enrollment declined, adjustments were not made to the budget so while Greendale bled students it also bled money.

In an attempt to make significant changes and keep the university open, severe austerity measures were implemented to “turn around an aircraft carrier” (Nadir, 2019). This included condensing the administrative structure, offering early retirement, and discontinuing adjunct contracts. Because adjuncts cannot be laid off, their contracts were not renewed for the following semester. Because adjuncts were not contracted, the remaining faculty increased their teaching loads to full-time. When tenure track faculty retired or resigned, their faculty lines were not replaced. To accommodate the loss of faculty lines, there were consolidations within the College of Liberal Arts. “As a result of that, some of the programs and the majors within the College of Liberal Arts were consolidated under one super-chair-type position and that's been Abed Nadir” (Perry, 2019). Numbers vary, by one account the university as a whole went from 160 full time tenure track faculty to 87, another account says that it went from 93 to 62 full time faculty. While severe cuts were made across the university, they were not proportionate across the different colleges and schools within Greendale.

The way that it affected us specifically I think the easiest shorthand is the University lost about 30% of its enrollment, but the College of Liberal Arts lost 40% of its personnel and resources. We took a disproportionate hit mostly because we were the younger starting to fill, last hired first fired kind of thing really fell hard on us because we have a lot of junior people on conditional annual contracts as opposed to multi-year contracts, and so they just felt they could let them go regardless of the impact on the programs. (Jeff Winger, 2019)

These numbers were not confirmed in other interviews; rather Dean Pelton refutes them. Pelton argues cuts were proportional across Greendale. However, Winger's explanation of why The College of Liberal Arts was disproportionate affected by the austerity measures follows how the College of Liberal Arts downsized administration, adjunct faculty, and relied on remaining adjuncts to perform duties of tenure track faculty. Winger's describes the budget cuts as opportunistic and without strategy. Because of the lack of strategy Winger and Nadir were not confident that Greendale was moving towards financial stability.

### **Interdisciplinary Studies Major's Relationship With Other Programs**

IDS is a Refugee Major for many students at Greendale. It functions as a retention tool to ensure Greendale does not lose potential revenue. To ensure IDS students have a meaningful experience, Abed Nadir works with academic departments to create courses of study that fit each student's academic interests and professional goals.

### **IDS is a Refugee Major: Individual Successes are University Successes**

The IDS administration identifies as a Refugee Major even though it does not use that language. Rather, Abed Nadir describes working with students who are in danger of not persisting because they no longer feel they are the properly suited for collegiate pursuits or are no longer secure in their professional goals and are unsure of their academic future. For a variety of reasons, students are not succeeding in their declared major (Greendale students must declare a major upon initial enrollment) and are in need of support to ensure degree completion. Nadir believes that these students are budding interdisciplinarians, unwilling to continue their studies confined in a single major.

These were students who were really bright, who were experiencing some kind of crisis, intellectually or usually both intellectually, emotionally, kind of morally, who didn't recognize themselves as interdisciplinarians, who really didn't know very well what interdisciplinary research was or was about or what it could mean for them. All they knew was that the discipline they thought they'd chosen as a major and in which they had been doing well or they knew they could be doing well, they just ceased to want to do it somehow. Or their grades had started to fall and they couldn't re-find their motivation. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

While Nadir is the director of the program, he also serves as the only academic advisor. He helps students discover their academic interests, develop an IDS course of study that reflects those interests, and creates a meaningful academic experience.

The advising process includes understanding what drew students to their original major. Nadir argues that understanding a student's initial academic interest is important for understanding why they lost interest in that degree. Understanding their initial interest opens a conversation about the student's skills and a "whole dimension of ways of perceiving the world that they feel they can't actualize, and that's often what's causing the problem within the discipline" (Nadir, 2019). Part of Nadir's process of repackaging a student's academic experiences is incorporating the strengths of their previous pursuits and where those interests fell short. He explains to students that they do not need to give up their disciplinary interests entirely, but rather add to them to create something different.

So I'll say "Well it's entirely possible for you to be both things and still be one person. You don't have to give up the institutional arrangement." The disciplines suggest always that you have to give up some dimension of who you want to be of yourself, of your

research interests, of your passions, in order to succeed. I don't think that's the case. I think you're probably an interdisciplinarian (Abed Nadir, 2019)

If students are not entirely leaving their original focus, they are staying, to a degree, with their initial academic interest. This means that students will utilize courses from the initial degree. The degree granting programs across campus provide the coursework without any of the benefits of citing the student as their own.

The power to take resources from other departments shows the strong political positioning of the program. IDS draws this political power from its ability to function as a retention tool. To institutionalize this political position, Nadir plans to use the current program review as documentation of the strengths of the program and how the program directly serves the university as well as the students' academic and professional pursuits. He wants to use the program review build the following argument:

"You're overlooking a significant dimension of this program in terms of its powerful ability to retain students and help them persist." And the program has a remarkable record for that, like a remarkable record for that. So I feel as though I've helped or facilitated students to not only get a clearer picture of where they want to go when they graduate, but I've also facilitated student's abilities to connect that with what they're really passionate about, and that opens them up to multiple disciplines from then on. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Nadir aims to connect individual student successes as part of the success of the whole university. These are students who were in danger of dropping out of college, a loss of revenue for the university. In addition to retaining this source of revenue, the IDS program ensures that



students are able to graduate in a timely manner while pursuing an academic interest that will help them achieve their professional goals.

### **Institutionalizing Relationships Through Rigor to Create Standard Practices**

The IDS major relies on course offerings from other departments. The only courses housed in the IDS major are courses that fulfill first year breadth requirement, the senior thesis preparation course, and thesis execution course. As the major relies on the course offerings of other departments, the IDS leadership developed relationships with the Office of the Registrar as well as individual academic programs. These relationships allow the IDS leadership to bypass restrictions on courses open to non-majors. The departments developed a sense of trust with the IDS leadership. There is enough trust between disciplinary majors and IDS that the disciplinary majors trust IDS to replace a course with rigorous directed-study under Abed Nadir. Abed Nadir describes this level of trust where: “I have no restrictions in what I'm able to create that way. I think, as I say, because they've come to trust that, if a student is going to leave here ill prepared, they're not going to leave” (2019). The departmental trust comes from the understanding that IDS is a rigorous program that ensures students receive an academically meaningful experience and is not simply throwing together a degree in an attempt to graduate in a timely manner. Nadir makes it clear he is unwilling to graduate students who have not shown mastery of their research area. Nadir looks for mastery not at the level of full mastery, but rather the student's ability to sustain an argument over a thesis while integrating at least two disciplinary perspectives. As Nadir developed relationships across the university, “the scaffolding for the major also helped build the scaffolding for interdisciplinary awareness on campus” (2019). Raising awareness of interdisciplinarity on campus helped further entrench the trust between IDS and the disciplinary programs.

Abed Nadir developed relationships across the university that allow him to create individualized courses of study for IDS students, he wants to institutionalize these relationships for future generations of IDS students regardless of the major's leadership. His goal is to engrain interdisciplinarity on campus and build support for the IDS major so

if people see me coming for a meeting, they know what they're in for. But it makes it a little bit more visible, makes interdisciplinarity and the practice of interdisciplinarity much more visible because I'm working with all the chairs. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Institutionalizing interdisciplinarity on campus will make running IDS easier as it normalizes the curriculum structure and the individualized nature of the program. Institutionalizing IDS at Greendale involves building relationships with disciplinary programs by folding disciplinary knowledge into interdisciplinary academic pursuits.

Abed Nadir describes the process by which he wants to institutionalize interdisciplinarity on campus that is very similar to Mission University's arrangement with other academic departments. Rather than individualizing each IDS course of study, Abed Nadir wants to design a starting point that draws from the strengths of disciplinary knowledge and develop majors from that starting point.

In attempting to institutionalize that as a practice, I went into all of those majors, I looked at their minors and then I did this in a couple ways. I did that more abstract work, analytic work, on my own, pulled out the key courses from those minors and then mapped out all the way across the other majors. Here are the two, three key courses you want that we have to hit somehow, so we to figure out how to scaffold your learning so that you're able to do those courses while missing this one and this one and this one, in their sequence. And then, I try to embed student choice, so that they, for the other two, three classes, so

that they're not just walking to something that seems canned and that's done. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

As an Interdisciplinary, Nadir is confident in his ability to discern the most critical disciplinary knowledge from course offerings at Greendale. Nadir's goal is to recreate the experience of a disciplinary program, without fulfilling all of the same requirements. Nadir's approach is different than Mission he is not working in conjunction with the disciplinary departments, but rather performing the analysis and developing pared down requirements on his own.

In addition to developing a preselected group of courses, Nadir wants to institutionalize the individualization of the program by normalizing the practice of teaching independent study coursework with him as the instructor. While Nadir has a standardized approach to establishing standardized coursework in each disciplinary department, he does not have a standardized approach to developing independent study courses that fill gaps left where students are unable to enroll in disciplinary coursework.

So I have some of these kinds of mapping out done that way, through these kind of working agreements with them. Often even though these are individualized, there are some specific courses they're looking for people to complete. Often I'll get together with [the department] and work out substitutions, or "Hey, I'm going to put this class together as a directed study because I want them to have this additional component, but you're not offering it there. Can I ... " (Abed Nadir, 2019)

While he is working to institutionalize the process, the program still rests on Nadir's ability to work with individual departments and bend the rules regarding how their curriculum is taught. Because Nadir has invested in these relationships with other departments, they trust him to teach their curriculum, not the IDS major broadly. Any attempt to institutionalize the process of

integrating courses from other departments into IDS on a regular basis is not matched by attempts to institutionalize independent studies.

### **Rigor: Balancing the Individual and the Program**

Greendale has institutionalized program assessments. However, IDS is still establishing what it means to have a rigorous curriculum. Because IDS has limited course offerings it relies on other programs to offer coursework for declared IDS students. As a hyper-decentralized program what is considered “rigorous” is based at the individual level rather than the programmatic level.

### **Program Reviews are Institutional Assessments**

Degree granting programs are supposed to undergo a program review every five years. However, IDS never completed a review despite being in existence for approximately 20 years and Abed Nadir argues that the major took its current form in 2013. As of Spring 2019 the program was under review with an expected completion date sometime in Summer of 2019. The head of the review committee did not offer an explanation of why the review was delayed. Abed Nadir offered the explanation that because it is such a small program with only one ladder faculty member; the program did not have the bandwidth to collect all of the data necessary for the program review. This explanation is supported by Britta Perry’s involvement in the program review process. As of her interview, Britta Perry was an adjunct professor in a program related to IDS and fulfilling some of the administrative duties related to the program review. There were no faculty members available to collect the data necessary for the program review outside of Abed Nadir.

Dean Pelton's description of the assessment process is standard in that it focuses on student learning objectives and how IDS institutionalizes measures to ensure they are meeting their own learning objectives. Dean Pelton sees the program review as establishing a benchmark for the program so in five years they can see how they meet their own measures of success. Because these measures were not already in place, this program review does not provide assessment, but rather prepares for future assessment. Dean Pelton also sees the role of the review committee and the review itself as

a self-reflection of the faculty to really sort of talk about how they see themselves in the program and the discipline, what their students are learning. We ask those very poignant questions directly back to them. Then on the committee level, we're then sort of the neutral arbitrator to sort of collect all that data and then determine, "Are there any Swiss cheese holes in the process?" Well, we want them to go back and plug up. (Dean Pelton, 2019)

Based on his description of the program review, there are no set external metrics. Rather, each individual program sets its own metrics for review and the next review assess if the program has met their goals and sees how the program measures based on the metrics from the previous program review. Those involved in the program describe the assessment as a formal process, however, the formalness of the review appears to be flexible as the review is not held at regular intervals and due to the lack of previous review for IDS, IDS is starting the process of development metrics and measures of success. A program review to see if IDS met its goals will not happen for at least another five years.

Teaching faculty were asked how they measure success individually and how IDS measures success. Most teaching faculty were not able to cite learning goals or general means of

assessment within the program. One member of the IDS teaching faculty pushed back against the idea of assessing the program and claimed that he is not “anti-assessment” but he turns to holistic, qualitative measures of success (Troy Barnes, 2019). Based on this comment, this faculty member did not understand the question of how the program measures success. He also views assessment as an entirely quantitative process without room for qualitative measures. In a follow up response, Troy explains his personal measure of success within his courses:

What I am really most interested in doing is really instilling in people a love of learning. My idea is that if you love reading and writing you're going to get good grades anyway. This whole thing about assessment is in a lot of ways I understand it but I think it ... It misses the point. (Troy Barnes, 2019).

The teaching faculty is disconnected from how IDS measures success, or potentially if success can be measured at all. Troy sees formal measures of success only in terms of grades and quantitative outputs. He does not see a way that his informal assessments could contribute to a formal program review.

### **Rigor Is Measured at the Individual Level**

Without formal assessment measures in place, the question becomes how teachers measure success in their classroom. As Troy Barnes was adamantly against quantitative measures of assessment, he provided a qualitative explanation of success in his classroom.

To me, the data is do they care? Do they show up? Do they just read something because somebody told them to read it or do they read it because they really ... I'm more about the learning for learning's sake. I don't like the whole ... I understand you've got to get good grades and I agree with that, but to me what I try to do is I read two or three books a

week. [...] What I try to do is convey this ethic of I tell them whatever it is you do, be into it. (Troy Barnes, 2019)

For Barnes, a rigorous classroom is engaging and instills the desire to learn and commit to learning. Rigor is embedded in instilling a desire to learn, good grades are an outcome of this desire. This measure of a rigorous classroom is not truly a measure of the classroom, but a measure at the individual level. A classroom may be a rigorous academic environment, but it is how the student engages with the classroom that is the real measure of the classroom's success.

Measuring success at the individual level is logical for IDS as it is a highly individualized major, tailored for the needs of each student. Within this highly individualized major, there are some structures in place to ensure students receive a rigorous, meaningful, academic experience.

They're round people in square holes, square pegs. Something like that. They don't like just being pigeonholed in a particular major. I really find that these students typically are self-driven, self-motivated, able to really think beyond the pale of a discipline. I think that's what drives them to this is they have a sense of, "How can I self-tailor my own education and graduate with a degree that means something to me?" [...] to this agenda that they can put sort of the curriculum together that is rewarding, intellectually stimulating, and it needs a lot of guidance. It needs a lot of, sort of tailoring and shaping.

(Dean Pelton, 2019)

The students who declare as IDS may not fit within traditional disciplinary silos. However, that does not mean they are not looking for an “intellectually stimulating” academic experience. The tailoring process is one that cannot be done by the students, but rather with the guidance of the IDS director. The process of tailoring each major to fit the individual student creates what Dean Pelton called a “Unitarian Degree.”

Unitarians are universal. Unitarians are a religious degree, sect, I guess, who take the best out of all religions and then homogenize them, and then preach and sort of do each one of those. That's what our students do. They're sort of universal Unitarians. I think that's what they are good at. It doesn't pigeonhole them. They're able to, I think, expand in each one of those areas they really want to. Then they can focus at the end, but I think there's a real sense of liberal thinking. Everything that we talk about in liberal studies and the sophistication of the student and the thinking mind, but this becomes sort of, "We're going to give it to you. You're going to do the best. We're going to help you do the best," and most of them get really high GPAs. (Dean Pelton, 2019).

The rigor of the IDS major is rooted in this highly individualized process of challenging students to be high achievers. Because it can be individualized, the Unitarian aspect of the major is that students can be challenged to achieve their individual goals. The students are driving the rigor of the program as it follows their interests and ability to integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives with some guidance. The high GPA as the outcome of this challenge and the rigorous programming is simply byproduct, not the goal of the program.

According to Pelton, the rigor of IDS is rooted in how successfully disciplines are integrated or "homogenized." While any discipline can be included in IDS, the disciplines need to be combined in an artful way that is mindful of their strengths, weaknesses, and learning outcomes associated with each discipline.

I've gained the reputation for being truly interdisciplinary in these ways we're talking about, but for being rigorous, for not just like, "Oh, just put these two together," for being rigorous about looking at learning outcomes and being able to understand how to scaffold those across multiple programs. (Abed Nadir, 2019)



Nadir's academic background is explicitly interdisciplinary, he is known at Greendale as the person who successfully integrates multiple disciplines. Because of this background Nadir is trusted to develop rigorous interdisciplinary courses of study with students. Nadir is attempting to institutionalize his expertise by institutionalizing the practices he uses to integrate multiple disciplines.

I went into all of those majors, I looked at their minors and then I did this in a couple ways. I did that more abstract work, analytic work, on my own, pulled out the key courses from those minors and then mapped out all the way across the other majors. Here are the two, three key courses you want that we have to hit somehow, so we to figure out how to scaffold your learning so that you're able to do those courses while missing this one and this one and this one, in their sequence. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Nadir's mapping can be used by other directors and potentially faculty who take on advising roles within IDS. This institutionalization of the IDS process at Greendale enables more faculty involvement rather than relying solely on Nadir to develop individual courses of study. In addition to standardizing IDS coursework in other disciplinary departments, Nadir is working to develop rigorous programming with the major. Nadir wants to ensure that all IDS students have a core set of classes that are rigorous in teaching IDS research methods and how to evaluate disciplinary research.

So, there're a core set of classes in the construction of the major, too, and I'm hammering away at building that rigor and building those abilities of students, whatever their choices of their disciplinary directions are. Building into this core set of classes in the major, that every IDS major takes, that sense of rigor, that sense of this is what it, that sense of research. You know, this is the research methodology, you need to know the assumptions

of your disciplines, you need to know the research methods associated with those assumptions, and then you need to know versions of validity. It's not truth or falsity, it's a version of validity that gets produced in and by the method which gets produced in and by the assumption. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Key to developing rigor in IDS is understanding how disciplines contribute to interdisciplinary conversations. Before students can successfully integrate multiple disciplines they need to understand the discipline's epistemology and how those assumptions affect research and how those assumptions interact with the assumptions of other disciplines. Nadir is looking for a standardized way of teaching students how to critically look at individual disciplines before integrated at least two into their thesis.

### **Evidence of a Rigorous Academic Experiences or Students Do Not Graduate**

While IDS at Greendale is a Refugee Major, the teaching faculty and Abed Nadir are firm in their belief that the major provides an academically meaningful experience. Nadir's developed trust with the other academic units on campus is supported by his unwillingness to graduate subpar theses and students who have not proven academic growth. As he states: "if a student is going to leave here ill prepared, they're not going to leave" (Nadir, 2019). Students come into IDS with a variety of academic preparations, but Nadir believes he can graduate students that are prepared for the work force.

They're not going to graduate from IDS because I can't live with myself if... It makes me sick to think about it. There are enough barriers to their success out there, without me just pushing them through a degree, so they can get a degree. (Abed Nadir, 2019).

Graduating is not sufficient for Nadir's definition of success. For Nadir, simply graduating does not meet his personal measure of a rigorous major. Rather, students need to have an academic

experience that is meaningful and they can take with them post-graduation. One way Nadir accomplishes this post-college life rigor by reverse engineering IDS courses of study based on students' post-college career goals. Starting from their desired career goals Nadir designs a major with each student that combines multiple disciplines as well as an internship that furthers the career goal.

Rigor at the individual level in IDS is found in how students move through the program and how it prepares them for life after college. Students who successfully progress through a program that prepares them for their desired career, integrates multiple disciplinary perspectives, and gives them an internship that connects these two things is a rigorous academic program. This career-centered approach is rooted in neoliberal assumptions of the value of college and the college major.

### **Greendale's Reliance on Adjunct Labor**

Adjunct faculty primarily teach Greendale's IDS. The adjunct faculty also teach the IDS breadth courses for all first-year students. However, they are unaware of how the major functions and its relationship to the rest of the university. Some of the adjunct faculty lack an understanding of their position at the university and their ability to secure a more stable position. Those who do understand their position as an adjunct professor are still asked to do curriculum development and create new programs they will not be allowed to chair because adjuncts cannot chair departments. As Greendale faced an uncertain financial future, the administrative solution was to cut tenure track faculty lines and replace them with adjunct faculty, forcing the remaining tenure track faculty to perform more service for the major and the university.

I have made a distinction in this chapter between tenure track faculty and adjunct faculty. However, tenure does not technically exist at Greendale. Rather, there is a contract renewal process for some faculty and no process for other faculty.

There's what we call the contract renewal process or rank advancement process. And for both of those things you apply to the personnel committee. Personnel Committee is elected among faculty members. It's run by the dean of faculty, chaired by the dean of faculty. In that process, there are three one-year contract renewal applications. So your first three years you apply every year for the renewal of your contract for another year. Once you get that third one, you then apply for a three-year contract renewal. Once you have one or two of those, you can then, apply for rank advancement to full professor status. But there's assistant and associate for full time faculty. And then there are other kinds of designations and other kinds of review processes for adjuncts. The adjuncts don't go through a formalized review process. They don't appear before the faculty personnel, the elected faculty personnel committee. It's the chairs. Which is, kind of fraught position for an adjunct faculty member to be in. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Even full professors are not fully protected at Greendale. Everyone is a contract worker. All faculty, regardless of designation, spoke to how it was difficult to work in an environment where they were unsure of the longevity of their employment. Of the three tenure faculty members interviewed, all three express concern for the adjunct review process. Jeff Winger argues that there are always administrators who hold of up the adjunct archetype, the established professional returning to lecture in a few classes late in their career, but that is a small percentage of the faculty at Greendale.

And then there's the Liberal Arts adjuncts who are your classic freeway flyer out here.

They literally are graduate degree holders who are piecing together a living teaching at three or four different institutions. The ideal type is just a complete ... It's a construct that you can always identify a couple like that, and trying to hold them up, and just that's what everybody does when it's just a lie. (Jeff Winger, 2019)

One classic freeway flyer in the IDS major is Annie Edison. Edison moved to the West Coast to join Greendale as an adjunct lecturer.

I'm still in two departments. I teach in communication department. I teach public speaking, media ethics, philosophy of communication. I also teach here in IDS, because I realized that I have a lot of experience in transdisciplinary studies. I can offer a lot of knowledge as well. (Annie Edison, 2019)

Annie Edison says that she is successful as an adjunct, concurrently teaching at other universities and Greendale. She believes because she has proven herself to the university that she will be rewarded with a tenure track position. What Winger refers to as the “construct” of the perfect adjunct does not exist at Greendale. At least not in the College of Liberal Arts or IDS. Because IDS is relatively young compared to the other programs on campus, the faculty were not on permanent full-time contracts, and therefore immediately cut to save money. Of the adjuncts still employed in IDS, the tenure track faculty expressed concerns over the exploitive behavior of the university. However, little action has been done to protect the adjunct faculty. Dean Pelton takes pride in that “we’ve fought to get them benefits” (2019). Britta Perry turned down those benefits because they were too expensive for her to afford when she put her children on the plan. The only other support the tenure track faculty developed for the adjunct faculty was a one-year contract, rather than a single semester contract, for Britta Perry in exchange for her developing

an urban studies major. Now that the program is developed there is no one to run the program because adjuncts cannot be program chairs and the university is unwilling to invest in additional tenure track faculty.

### **Adjunct Faculty Exceed the Job Description**

Britta Perry provides a compelling example of adjunct faculty fulfilling duties associated with tenure track jobs. She describes coming to Greendale because it provided more opportunities, including staying in the city where her husband is employed.

At the time Greendale provided more academic professional development opportunities.

The pay was worse, but there was more flexibility to develop curriculum and build a program. Over ten years later I now see pros and cons to remaining in a position with no upward mobility and very low pay, but I made the decision based on growth opportunities as an academic. (Britta Perry, 2019)

As an adjunct faculty member, Britta Perry teaches in the College of Liberal Arts. The College expressed an interest in providing an Urban Studies Major. In addition to her teaching duties, Britta Perry developed the major. The administration was pleased with this work, but was unwilling to hire a tenure track faculty member to chair the department, raise Britta Perry's status to tenure track, or allow Britta Perry to run the program as an adjunct faculty member. The Urban Studies Major has remained at the proposal stage because of the administrations' choice to not invest in the major. In addition to developing the Urban Studies Major, Britta Perry has also taken over the duties of tenure track faculty members so those faculty members could take sabbaticals. These additional duties have not ensured her employment beyond her 1-year contract. Despite her continued service to the university, Britta Perry remains on a limited contract.

Jeff Winger highlights how faculty often go beyond their job description by mentoring students, not just teaching them. As the teaching faculty at Greendale, they have significant interaction with IDS and first-year students. However, because of their employment status they are easily replaced year to year.

The problem is students who form a relationship, they're in the department for at least three years, and they form a relationship with faculty who are adjuncts, and then they would not be available, or go on to another thing, or something else. All of a sudden they're left scrambling to try to find a mentor or an advisor who gets them and understands them and what they're doing. (Jeff Winger, 2019)

Any relationship a student develops with an adjunct faculty member is at risk of disruption due to hiring practices. While adjunct faculty may become de facto mentors and advisors, they cannot provide any long-term service to the university and students, as they are not guaranteed to hold those positions year to year. The IDS major has somewhat protected itself from this issue, as Abed Nadir performs all of the advising for students. The adjunct faculty who teach in IDS are uncomfortable providing any form of advising to students. Despite this concern over non-continuous mentoring, the adjunct faculty often become mentors to students and work with them in directed study opportunities to fulfill their academic interests. If an adjunct faculty leaves Greendale, their students are left to find new mentors and faculty to work with them to achieve their individual goals.

### **Adjuncts are Unaware of How IDS Functions within the University**

The adjunct faculty's choice to not act as advisors to students partially stems from their lack of knowledge about the intricacies of the major. It is also indicative of their lack of knowledge about the major and how it functions within the university. It is not the role of an

adjunct faculty member to function as an advisor, guiding a student through the process of declaring in IDS. Nor is it the role of the adjunct faculty to be involved in the work across the university that tenure track faculty are traditionally involved. However, their lack of knowledge about how the major functions, on a basic level within the university, shows adjunct faculty are significantly secluded from any significant organizational conversations.

Abed [Nadir] would give you way more answer. He knows way more than I do on this.

I'm just so busy teaching the classes that I'm teaching and then doing my own writing and doing my own work that I'm not privy to these bigger conversations. (Troy Barnes, 2019)

As the adjunct faculty are unaware of how the major functions within the broader organization, there are unable to support the development of the major. If the IDS major wants to utilize the labor already invested in its program, it would need to start educating the adjunct faculty about the intricacies of the major as well as how it interacts with the rest of the university. As the adjunct faculty are currently involved, they cannot be expected to shift into tenure track positions, involved in the development and growth of IDS.

### **Pressure on Tenure Track Faculty's Time Limits Ability to Grow IDS**

Tenure track faculty perform a disproportionate amount of service to the university because there are few tenure track faculty members left at Greendale. Because the few remaining tenure track faculty members have been forced to take on an increasing amount of administrative work, there is little bandwidth to develop and grow the existing IDS. As of data collection, only one tenure track faculty member was employed in IDS.

It's sometimes really a struggle to get what are often overworked, overstressed full-time faculty, so we end up getting [adjunct] faculty to do it. But that's even worse because we've never been able to actually get a compensation model approved for them unless



we're able to essentially create a class or two that's an independent study within the curriculum for that [adjunct] person to teach and therefore get paid by working with that student. (Jeff Winger, 2019)

Because of budget restrictions and a lack of flexibility, the tenure track faculty take on additional teaching roles in addition to providing adequate administrative support for the program. Abed Nadir speaks to how the multiple demands on tenure track faculty's time means that there is little room for developing IDS. The only way to make room for development is to hire at least one more tenure track faculty member.

I may already have figured out a way to do this, but what I would ask for is simply another faculty line. I need to train somebody to do any number of the things that I now know how to do. One, just to pass it on for the institution, but two because I can't continue to do it as an individual. (Abed Nadir, 2019)

Nadir recognizes embodying all of the institutional knowledge of the IDS major is not a sustainable model that ensures the longevity of the IDS major. Training another tenure track faculty member means Nadir can share the advising and administrative work with another individual and work to better entrench interdisciplinarity on campus with two faculty members that raise awareness of interdisciplinarity on campus.

The adjunct faculty acknowledges they are unable to provide the support Nadir's needs to develop the program. They also understand that continuing the model of a single tenure track faculty member with multiple adjunct faculty members is unsustainable.

I don't find using contract labor to provide administrative support on an as-needed basis to be a sustainable solution. Currently we have one full-time faculty member serving as

chair, student mentor, and advisor. This makes it impossible to also respond to pressures to recruit and growth the program. (Britta Perry, 2019)

Perry continues it is unfair to ask adjunct faculty to contribute to the administrative aspects of the major on a contract or flat fee basis. The amount of time adjuncts contribute to teaching and administrative duties can approximate those of full time faculty, but for a fraction of the pay. Adjuncts often feel uncomfortable saying no because their contingent status makes them vulnerable: they want to appear as "team players." Also, any additional revenue helps to make ends meet and, at Greendale where lecturers are paid under \$4,000 for a 16-week class, many struggle to bring in any additional money. The university pressures IDS to grow the program, something they are eager to do, but it currently seems only possible within the confines of an exploitative labor model.<sup>1</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The overarching story of IDS at Greendale is an understaffed major that is functioning at an unsustainable pace. Due to the financial uncertainty of Greendale, IDS attempted to institutionalize the program, but faces significant hurdles rooted in the financial uncertainty. In an attempt to work through austerity measures, the single tenure track faculty member, Abed Nadir, stepped forward and provided all of the administrative and intellectual support for the major. The adjunct and tenure track faculty all acknowledge IDS' current practices under the austerity measures are unsustainable. Nadir is not capable of sustaining his work pace, as it is currently unsupported. The program will also face future budget cuts if it is unable to create

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph was written in conjunction with Britta Perry. Before submitting the dissertation, all participants were contacted to approve their quotes. Perry felt the original summary following the quote insufficiently portrayed the labor dynamics at Greendale. The final version of this paragraph is a collaboration between Marias Dezendorf and Perry.

independent sustainability measures. This could create a similar cycle in the future where a single tenure track faculty member is forced to run the program unsupported. If Nadir were to leave Greendale for some reason, there would be no institutional knowledge or understanding of how the program functions within the broader university as Nadir is still in the process of institutionalizing the major.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

This chapter revisits the three key themes of the dissertation and provides an overarching analysis across participating universities. Faculty composition plays a key role in how IDS govern themselves and interact with the rest of the university. Discussions of rigor in IDS emerged from discussions about IDS considers success within the major. One commonality across all programs is a lack of formal assessment within the major. All IDS rely to some extent on the other departments to provide coursework, but programs have varying relationships with these departments based on the size of IDS and how much pressure that size places on the other departments. Each previous research site chapter focused on an individual program. This chapter will look across institutions and provide insight into their commonalities and differences. Before concluding, the chapter will include directions for future research that often addresses limitations of this dissertation. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of way ways these institutions build sustainability into their practices to ensure their success.

### **Faculty Composition and Labor Expectations Vary Across Institutions**

Across the four universities are two staffing models to IDS majors. The first model is a single administrator running the program. The second model is a single tenure track faculty member who oversees a team of adjunct faculty members. Both Eastern State University (ESU) and Greendale follow this model with a difference in how involved the adjunct faculty is in running the program by acting as advisors. These varying models are key for understanding the key differences in the development and governance of each program.

## **The People Who Teach the Program Do Not Necessarily Run the Program**

When discussing the differences of who runs programs versus who teaches in them, a single administrator each runs Mission and Fernham. As an individual, the administrator is expected to develop the relationships necessary to advise the program and ensure the involvement of other departments. At Mission the expectation of the single administrator is to ensure the program runs smoothly. The program requires little maintenance from Julian Eaves. The IDS program runs smoothly partially because it does not have many students declaring in the major, allowing Eaves to give individualized attention to each student. Eaves does not need to develop relationships with the faculty who will help support the student. Rather, he helps the student develop their proposal and the student uses the proposal to find a faculty member who will support their independent work.

### **Programs with a single administrator without interdisciplinary training.**

Fernham currently uses a similar model of one head administrator for the major. A committee for three tenure track faculty members technically oversees the major. However, two of these faculty members denied interviews citing Mandy Pepperidge as the authority on IDS. Pepperidge is also the administrator overseeing the broader degree completion program (DCP). I argue this makes Pepperidge the de facto single administrator. On a small campus, Pepperidge works with other departments who already expressed interest in the degree completion program. It is through the relationship with DCP that IDS develops relationships with other programs. This is a perfect illustration of how IDS functions in general. There are few things developed explicitly for IDS, but it benefits from everything developed for the DCP. Everything that Pepperidge does for the DCP directly benefits IDS.

In both Mission and Fernham, the administrator running the IDS major does not have any explicitly interdisciplinary background. Both people have disciplinary terminal degrees. Despite their lack of training, Eaves and Pepperidge work across disciplines to move students from multidisciplinary programming to interdisciplinary programming. Pepperidge does have some experience with this kind of administrative work. Each major at Fernham that is interdisciplinary in nature has a faculty committee, similar to the IDS major, that is made of faculty from three contributing disciplines. Pepperidge has served on one of these committees as a chemist in an interdisciplinary major that draws knowledge development from the chemistry tradition. While Pepperidge does not have interdisciplinary training, she does have experience working across disciplines to provide leadership for a major that integrates multiple disciplinary perspectives.

For Fernham and Mission, IDS is developed and maintained by individuals without interdisciplinary training, but have taught themselves interdisciplinary theory and best practices in IDS. In both of these institutions students are not taught by interdisciplinarians or within IDS, rather they take courses within the disciplines and must integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives on their own. Therefore, the student experience mirrors the administrative experience.

#### **Adjunct faculty roles vary by institution.**

Greendale and ESU have similar staffing arrangements with a single tenure track faculty member and supporting adjunct faculty members. At both universities these faculty have interdisciplinary training and come with explicitly interdisciplinary backgrounds. The assumption is that the tenure track faculty member provides the leadership while the adjunct faculty teach. And while this is technically true, the adjunct faculty at ESU are involved in the major beyond teaching because they also act as advisors for the program and are therefore

involved in organizational changes to the major. However, at Greendale the role of the adjunct faculty as teachers holds true, but the tenure track faculty member of the program also serves as a lecturer, working with students on independent study courses and their theses.

At ESU the adjunct faculty understand the broader vision of the major and how they can contribute to achieving that goal as individuals. This is most true for Joe Kane as he was and continues to adjunct for IDS before and after Sam Winters' directorship. Kane was part of implementing Winters' vision. Part of this was his involvement in hiring new adjunct faculty and instilling Winter's vision for the program. The adjunct faculty interviewed spoke about the overarching goals of IDS and how the policies set in place to achieve those goals were already in place when they were hired. This is true, however, they had not been in place for a significant amount of time. The adjunct faculty also spoke to the leadership role Joe Kane holds as the institutional knowledge source for the adjunct faculty. Part of this leadership was Kane and Winters working together to develop the new required coursework and decide how to implement Winter's new priorities in advising. Winters provided the leadership; Kane helped develop the tools and implemented the new vision with the adjunct faculty.

Unlike ESU, the adjunct faculty at Greendale only teach. They are minimally involved in any IDS processes. When asked about advising processes, how the major works with other departments on campus, or what majors students often transfer from, the adjunct faculty at Greendale were unwilling and unable to respond. Often, the adjunct faculty stated that they did not know the answer to my questions. Alternatively, the adjunct faculty often suggested that I redirected my questions to Abed Nadir because he could answer my questions. It was these two responses that support how separated the adjunct faculty are from the rest of the program, as they do not feel they can speak to anything regarding how IDS functions.

Part of this difference between how ESU adjuncts and Greendale adjuncts interact with IDS is due to their time constraints. The adjunct faculty at ESU are unionized and only teach at ESU. While they do not teach at other universities, they also function as academic advisors. In addition to these responsibilities, the ESU adjunct faculty are all publishing research. The Greendale adjunct faculty are not in the same position. The Greendale adjunct faculty fit the freeway flyer stereotype. They teach at multiple universities and sometimes have other projects outside of academia. They often describe being spread very thin and without sufficient time to work with students outside of their coursework. And if they do work with students outside of their coursework they are not compensated for their time. The Greendale adjunct faculty are also publishing in academic and nonacademic venues. Both adjunct faculties have many demands on their time. However, because ESU adjuncts are rooted at a single university, the faculty are invested in the major and invest their time into the vision of the program. Alternatively, Greendale adjunct faculty are not rooted in a single university and do not have the physical or mental energy to invest in the future of the program.

### **Program Development Is Affected by Program Leadership and Staffing**

Programs with limited support have limited opportunities to develop and grow. When only one person is in charge of running IDS, that individual has limited bandwidth and those limitations impact how much IDS can develop and grow. It is unclear if a single person is in charge of running the program, if it is possible to develop sustained support for the program and allow for IDS to develop.



**Leaders without support lack the bandwidth for growth regardless of interest.**

Two programs in this study had a single person in a leadership position without any support and were not seeing any development in the program: Mission and Greendale. Mission University has a single administrator who has not seen any changes to the program in his tenure at IDS. However, at no point was Julian Eaves interested in changing the program or further developing it. The lack of development for IDS is not due to a lack of support. Mission University is not interested in developing the program further. As Eaves attests, the university is happy with the program as it currently stands, particularly because the tenure track faculty feel there are sufficient departments at the university that a double major or combination of minors can fulfill student interests. A single administrator is sufficient to run a program the administration has no intention of growing and the administrator has no interest in developing.

Greendale is a different situation. Despite a lack of support from the administration during a financial crisis, Abed Nadir slowly developed IDS' position on campus by bringing interdisciplinarity into conversations about general education by being an active faculty member serving on multiple committees. However, Nadir talks about how he is spread very thin because he is responsible for every aspect of IDS. He is responsible for representing the major to the university, advising students, working with the registrar, and teaching courses and independent studies. In his interview Nadir talks about wanting to develop new advising methods and approaches to better serve IDS students. He also wants to develop new coursework that will help bring IDS students together. He says that while he wants to do these things, he does not have the time or resources to grow the program. Nadir looks forward to Jeff Winger returning the IDS even though Winger's appointment was shared with another department. Winger was aware of how his return to the faculty will support IDS development and expressed that he was prepared

to support Nadir in whatever ways he needed to further develop the program. Nadir also spoke to how he is unsure if he can sustain the program as he has for the past several years. He acknowledges it is not sustainable for him to run IDS as he has for much longer. He needs support otherwise the major would fail.

### **Leaders with faculty support IDS development and growth.**

Alternatively two programs have a single administrative, tenure track leader, but are supported by adjunct faculty. These programs see organizational changes on an ongoing basis because they have the organizational, systemic support that provides a dependable environment for experimentation and development. In addition to institutional support, multiple faculty members are actively involved in the program creating the bandwidth necessary to develop and implement organizational change. In this dissertation, these two institutions are ESU and Fernham.

At ESU a team of adjunct faculty members, specifically Joe Kane who helped run the program and write the new student manual with Sam Winters, support Sam Winters. The ESU faculty can be described as an interdisciplinary team as they all contribute to running the major and ensuring all students pursue their academic interests. This teamwork is best exemplified by Winters and Kane working together when Winters became director. Winters had a clear vision to make the major more research focused and raise the rigor of the senior thesis. To help develop the scaffolding to support this change Winters worked with Kane to write a new student handbook that explicitly narrowed the range of acceptable theses. The Winters' directorship coincided with significant faculty turn over. Kane was part of the hiring committee for the entire current adjunct faculty who teach in IDS. He is the most senior adjunct faculty member and is seen as a leader along with Winters. The new adjuncts joined what they saw as a team working

together to create a better IDS. Each adjunct member sees their advisory and teaching work as important to the success of each student as well as the major. It is their teamwork mentality that leads to successful policy implementation and organizational change.

Fernham does not have the same extensive team working to develop IDS, but there is an institutionalized team approach to program development that ensures programs are developed by teams of people. Mandy Pepperidge works with two other faculty members to develop IDS. While working on a team is helpful to distribute responsibilities, it is the existence of a standard of practices that institutionalizes program development. There is a standard means of developing programs and IDS follow those institutional norms. These institutional norms allow Pepperidge to perform her administrative duties elsewhere while also contributing to the development of IDS. When Pepperidge and the IDS development team agreed to develop the program, there was an understanding of the practice standards. The institutionalization of organizational change and program development institutionalized IDS and sets it on par with every other academic major at Fernham.

### **Involving Faculty in Organizational Change Ensures Sustainability.**

When more involved faculty are in the administration of IDS, the work of developing and growing a program is dispersed across more people. When multiple people share the responsibility for program development and change, the weight of the project does not overburden a single individual. This weight can keep the program from developing, as seen at Greendale. However, when the project is spread across multiple people who can contribute at different levels, such as ESU, changes in policy are easier to implement. Adjunct faculty does not have to be strictly teaching faculty. If IDS is willing to invest in adjunct faculty and provide

them the means and opportunity to contribute to IDS, they will if they feel as if they are a valued team member.

### **Rigor is Defined Inconsistently, Remains a Meaningful Part of IDS Development**

The concept of rigor was introduced in interviews with a question about how the major measures success and if according to that measure the major is successful. The answers participants gave varied from declarations that the participant doesn't believe in assessment to declaring that the program is successful because students graduate.

### **Rigor is Aligned with Neoliberalism**

While definitions of rigor vary across IDS they have one major commonality: a bend towards neoliberalism that focuses on student future employability as a primary objective and measure of a program's success. IDS contributes to the development of a private good, the future earner, rather than support the student pursuing their interests as an intellectual who contributes to their society (Olssen & Peters, 2005). While not necessarily an "external influence" according to the Academic Plan Model, this level of neoliberalism in the academy is indicative of the status quo in higher education that values private goods over public goods.

ESU was recently ranked as the best place to design your own degree in the United States. All participants cited this ranking as something the major was proud of, even if they did not trust the methodology behind the ranking (the methodology is not publicly available). This ranking was cited in reference to how the major measures success. It was an indirect process by which the ranking became a badge of honor. A former student saw the rankings and sent the article in an email to Steve Lattimer. Lattimer sent the article to Sam Winters as a joke because the rankings source was not reputable. Sam Winters then forwarded the article to Dean Charles

Shane. Dean Shane then announced the rankings to the whole college as a point of honor for the major. Despite concerns about the source of the ranking, faculty said that this ranking was a point of pride. The argument was that the program was successful if outside measurements found it successful. However, the faculty remained untrusting of the ranking. This reliance on an unreliable ranking roots the program's concern about image in credentialism. Rather than being concerned about grounded measures of success, the program has fixated on an external one rooted in the neoliberal race to use credentials to achieve post-graduation.

Fernham developed an entire program because of market research. IDS cannot be discussed outside of the Degree Completion Program (DCP). The reasons for the DCP are highlighted when discussing IDS. Fernham did market research to understand whom they were not serving in their community. This research found there was a significant swirling population that had most of the credits for a degree, but not all of them (McCormick, 2003). Fernham developed DCP with programs that would take students' credits and repackage them into a degree. IDS was an extension of this process by providing even more flexibility than the disciplinary majors associated with DCP. Fernham wanted to ensure that students would be able to repackage their credits in a way that shortened time to degree completion. While Fernham wants students to have an academically meaningful experience, Pepperidge also wants to ensure students complete a degree in a reasonable amount of time without accruing more debt. The Fernham DCP aims to provide students a means to use the credits they have already paid for to complete their degree. Rigor, according to this model, is timely graduation. Pepperidge spoke of needing to create shared experiences for students through the thesis course and required courses that teach interdisciplinary theory. However, she said this would be difficult to achieve if IDS would continue to meet the DCP goals of timely graduation.

Greendale's history is rooted in business education. This focus on developing individuals to succeed in the private sector continues in their ethos. When discussing the goals of the major and how to achieve them, Abed Nadir focuses on the ability to teach students the value of IDS and how to convey the value of IDS to future employers. As part of developing the ability to convey the value of IDS, Nadir spoke to the need to develop students' professional identity. Nadir helps students develop skills for their post-graduation careers by using their thesis preparation and execution as an opportunity to develop project management and communication skills. Nadir does not want students to develop these skills as part of developing the student as an individual, but rather as a means of developing the student as a successful employee. For Nadir, the measure of the program's rigor is rooted in teaching students employable skills. If students demonstrate they can communicate what they learned in IDS to people outside of the interdisciplinary world the major is successful.

Julian Eaves at Mission never explicitly discussed rigor within the program outside of the proposal process discussed in the next section. Eaves embeds the program's rigor in the coursework and student's ability to write a thesis with faculty supervision. There is no discussion of measures of success outside of graduation.

### **IDS Rely on the Rigor of Disciplinary Majors that Provide Coursework**

None of the IDS included in this dissertation teach all of their own coursework. Each relies to some extent on disciplinary departments to teach courses that allow students to pursue their individualized course plan. Each of these courses is taught from the perspective of that discipline, for students of that discipline. IDS students entrench themselves in that disciplinary lens for the duration of the class. At Greendale, adjunct faculty can spot which students in their classes are IDS students as they often challenged disciplinary assumptions and epistemology.

Each of the programs works from the interdisciplinary model that requires disciplinary knowledge before integrating multiple lenses into an interdisciplinary perspective (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The level of integration at each level is questionable, especially with limited opportunities for students to practice integrating their coursework into a unified source of knowledge that allows them to research their intellectual interests in their senior thesis. The coursework provides opportunities for students to pursue disciplined approaches to investigating their intellectual interests. However, they do not provide the means or opportunities to bring multiple disciplinary experiences together.

This process of integrating knowledge is a continuum where students can move from multidisciplinary (lacking integration) to interdisciplinarity with partial integration to full integration (Klein, 2010). Any level of interdisciplinarity that moves beyond juxtaposing towards blending of disciplinary perspectives requires training and practice at the undergraduate level. These skills are generally taught in thesis preparation or thesis execution courses (Casey, 2010). Each program spoke to the importance of these courses in achieving the goal of integration. Within the model of disciplinary coursework building the foundation for interdisciplinary integration, there is never concern about the rigor of the disciplinary coursework. Each IDS program develops their thesis coursework to ensure rigorous interdisciplinarity. They rely on each discipline to do this same in disciplinary coursework. This relationship between IDS and disciplinary majors is further explored later in this chapter.

### **Assessments Fulfill Institutional Processes Not IDS Development**

Formalized internal assessment processes are limited in participating IDS. Few of the participating IDS could speak to ongoing assessments in their major beyond course evaluations mandated by the governing college. When asked about how the program is assessed broadly,

participants spoke to graduation data that is regularly gathered by the university and used during program evaluations. ESU found graduation data gathered by the college insufficient, as the sample size was too small to run any significant analysis. They utilize their own exit-survey students are required to complete before they participate in graduation ceremonies. ESU uses this data to track student experience, satisfaction with the major, and plans post-graduation. Fernham has not graduated any students yet and has only matriculated a few students. When asked about how she plans to assess the program, Pepperidge could not speak to future plans. At the time of his interview, Julian Eaves just completed a review of graduated IDS students from the past ten years. This was a review of time to completion and students thesis topics. Greendale employs university wide exit surveys and relies on students to contact the department to share their post-graduation accomplishments. Former ESU students also contact the teaching faculty to touch base and share their post-graduation achievements. At neither ESU nor Greendale are there formalized methods to connect with graduates to track their careers and measure potential connections to their interdisciplinary training. Multiple participants spoke to a desire to develop such an assessment at ESU. They cite a lack of financial and institutional support for such an assessment. They also spoke to a lack of continuity in sustained leadership to implement longitudinal assessment.

In each IDS at least one participant mentions a university-wide focus on graduate school matriculation as a measure of success. ESU and Greendale expressed concerns about the focus on students pursuing graduate education. This was particular true of students pursuing graduate degrees in the arts and social sciences. This concern was discussed at length with Britta Perry at Greendale. As an adjunct faculty member she was frustrated by her inability to find full time



employment on the tenure track. Perry and Kane agree that it may be unethical to push students towards a career with an unstable employment future.

Each program undergoes program review and submits those findings to the university. Such a review is systematized at each university. At ESU it was the catalyst for changing the director. At Mission, Eaves is expected to complete a review every few years, though Eaves did not share the extent of the review. Fernham was too early in their development to discuss any systematized review. The only university whose review process was not as systematic as proposed was at Greendale. The program review for Greendale was delayed because there was not sufficient faculty support to complete the data collection necessary for a full review. Abed Nadir is the single tenure track faculty member for IDS and the chair for several other departments that he is either the only or one of few tenure track faculty members. As Nadir did not have the bandwidth to perform the data collection necessary for review, the review was postponed. With the review underway during data collection, the head of the review committee argues the data supports the need to hire additional tenure track faculty in IDS as it was evident a single tenure track faculty member was insufficient.

Assessment in these cases is about fulfilling institutional processes. Without formal assessment, each program maintains their students have a meaningful, rigorous, academic experience. In their arguments about student experiences in IDS, participants did not speak to assessments and disciplinary knowledge, but rather the student's development. Participants argue successful rigorous programs produced students who could make a sustained argument that integrated multiple disciplines in their thesis. This remained the most important academic measure of success and rigor in IDS.

### **IDS Rely on Other Programs to Function without Drawing too Much Attention**

As previously discussed, IDS rely on disciplinary programs to provide the majority of their coursework. Therefore, for IDS majors to succeed they rely on disciplinary programs to function on a basic level. As there are often students from multiple departments in any course, IDS students are simply another student in a disciplinary classroom. Unless an individual lecturer looks into the composition of their class, the lecturer may be entirely unaware of the disciplinary makeup of their classroom. However, on smaller campuses the disciplinary makeup of classrooms is more noticeable. With fewer resources available, it is noticeable when departments start using each other's resources. For small IDS to be successful, disciplinary departments need to know how they contribute to IDS. This phenomenon was recently discussed at the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies annual conference. Representatives from multiple universities spoke to the need to be a larger enough program so IDS is not easily forgotten by the university, but small enough that they do not threaten disciplinary departments.

Three of the IDS in this major follow the model of being big, yet small at the same time. The fourth IDS believed that it was better for them to be a larger program because then they would be "too big to fail."

Mission and Fernham were of similar size, but different approaches to developing their relationships with disciplinary departments. Mission takes the approach of staying a very small program and often directs students to double majors in the disciplinary departments. When students do declare IDS, they are part of a very small, controlled department. While Mission's IDS remains small, they have prearranged disciplinary requirements with each department that fulfill disciplinary measures of rigor that give students the necessary grounding in the discipline before moving towards integration. These course work agreements were established to provide

students with the minimal disciplinary training needed to pursue their academic interests. These arrangements fulfill minimal measures of rigor from the disciplinary departments and IDS. The coursework agreements also provide a paper trail to validate IDS students in impacted upper division courses.

Fernham employs a similar model, but not as prescribed. IDS works closely with disciplinary departments who are committed to DCP. These were programs that regularly offer courses in the evenings and on weekends for working students. IDS works with these departments to set up requirements that would create a disciplinarily sound curriculum while maintaining the rigor of the major. Fernham has not had the opportunity to grow yet, so this model may shift in the future. However the current plan is to remain small and work closely with disciplinary departments to create a meaningful academic experience.

Greendale is currently a small program that is attempting to become a larger program with a larger footprint on campus. Abed Nadir expressed the desire to create a new program that mirrors Mission in how it has established relationships and set curriculum in each disciplinary department. Nadir has been able to grow the program to the point he has without disrupting disciplinary silos by becoming a visible advocate for interdisciplinarity at Greendale. As he described it, when people saw him walk into a meeting they knew they were going to hear about interdisciplinarity. While the program itself remains relatively small, Nadir was able to build the reputation of the program at the university and interdisciplinarity in general.

ESU is significantly larger than every other program in this study. It graduates more students than the other programs combined in any given year. Describing ESU's IDS as "too big to fail" is attributed to Joe Kane. The argument made is that the more students IDS serves, the less likely it will be to suffer under budget cuts. To establish a large footprint on campus to

complement the number of declared students, IDS involves disciplinary departments through the faculty advisor board. The faculty advisory board is currently composed of 11 faculty members, the director, and Joe Kane. These 13 people represent 12 different disciplines. Including a large number of disciplines in IDS encourages disciplinary departments to invest in interdisciplinarity.

### **Future Research Intro Organizational Change In IDS**

Fernham provides the most opportunity for future research on organizational change in IDS majors. This is partially due to the lack of participants. Future work will focus on the other two members of the faculty committee that oversee IDS. Specifically how the three faculty members work together to develop IDS. As DCP becomes a larger program with more students, does IDS grow at a similar rate? Additionally, does a change in size change the relationship between IDS and DCP? Fernham provides an alternative direction for future research by pursuing research related to programs that are interdisciplinary in nature. How have these programs institutionalized sustainable practices? How do their experiences at Fernham differ from IDS and what lessons can they provide for IDS broadly?

If the austerity measures work, Greendale should be financially stable in a few years. Future research will interrogate if Greendale achieves this goal and returns to pre-2008 spending behavior. Alternatively, are austerity measures never lifted regardless of changes to financial stability? What happens to programs like IDS who struggled to stay afloat with the promise that austerity measures are not permanent?

Most research sites in this dissertation rely on adjunct faculty labor. Future research will interrogate the role of contingent labor in what some may describe as contingent programs. Specifically, future work will examine the role of unions in stabilizing IDS program by protect IDS adjunct faculty. Within the next year years the newer adjunct faculty members at ESU will

be going under review that will potentially lead to them receiving full protection within the adjunct union. With this shift, do adjuncts at ESU teach, research, and advise differently than they did before? How does the adjunct union affect program level policies and IDS' relationship with the rest of the university?

### **Conclusion: Best Practices From Four Universities With Different IDS Contexts**

Each of the programs in this study has strengths in different areas. Each program is at a different stage in its development within a different institutional context. Despite their differences, each program provides insight into how to develop sustainable IDS.

The programs that align themselves with university best practices function the same way as disciplinary programs. This allowed these programs to entrench themselves the same way disciplinary majors are entrenched in the university. This is particularly true for Fernham who uses the same three-person committee model as other interdisciplinary majors and follows the same senior theses model as disciplinary majors. It is also helpful to have support from someone high in the administration such as Mandy Pepperidge.

The programs that have existed for the most amount of time are the largest and smallest programs. Mission is small enough to fly under the radar and exist within an advising unit rather than an academic one. It also does not have the same responsibilities as a disciplinary unit and can function successfully by graduating a handful of students every 10 years. ESU takes the opposite approach and becomes "too big to fail." ESU educates a significant percentage of undergraduate students, therefore fulfilling the mission of the College of Letter and Science. This protects it from shifts in leadership higher than the director. The extremes are the most successful in creating sustainable programs that quickly chug along or loudly announce themselves as a means to serve large numbers of students.

Finally, the relationship between tenure track and adjunct faculty can make the difference between a program that is run by an interdisciplinary team versus an individual faculty member who oversees lecturers who teach and are uninvolved in the larger interdisciplinary project. This difference is most exemplified by ESU and Greendale. These two institutions are composed of the same number of tenure track and adjunct faculty. What is different is how invested adjunct faculty are in the major adjunct faculty and how invested the major is in the adjunct faculty. Abed Nadir runs Greendale IDS. The adjunct faculty supports him by teaching courses, but they do not support the program in any other way. Alternatively the adjunct faculty at ESU supports Sam Winters in many ways outside of teaching. While the entire faculty in these two programs spoke about being understaffed and not having enough time or energy, ESU faculty members work together to run IDS and support the students while Abed Nadir works alone to do the same work. This is a cultural difference rooted in funding structures that value or devalue adjunct labor.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Table 1: Interview Protocol

Constructs/ Assumptions	Questions	Further Questions	Probe
Personal Background	What do you have a degree in?		
	How long have you worked for this program?		
	How did you come to work for this program?	Where were you before this program? How did you find out about this program?	
History	How is the major CURRENTLY set up?	What does the curriculum look like? What are the requirements?	
		Who are your students?	How many students are currently involved in the major? By focus?
			How would you describe your students?
			When do students declare as an IDS major?
			Why do they come to your major?
			Who are your alumni? Do you have some kind of alumni network?
		Where does the program fit organizationally?	What department is this major nested in, where is that department located?
			What is the governance of this program?
			Where does the funding for this major come from? Are there external funders?
		Is the program currently thriving, declining, or stagnant?	
	What was the program like when you joined?	What did the curriculum look like? What were the requirements?	
		Who were your students?	How many students were involved in the major? By focus?
			How would you describe your students?
			When did students declare as an IDS major?
			Why did they come to your major?
			Who are your alumni? Do you have some kind of alumni network?
		Where did the program fit organizationally?	What department was this major nested in, where was that department located?
			What was the governance of this program?

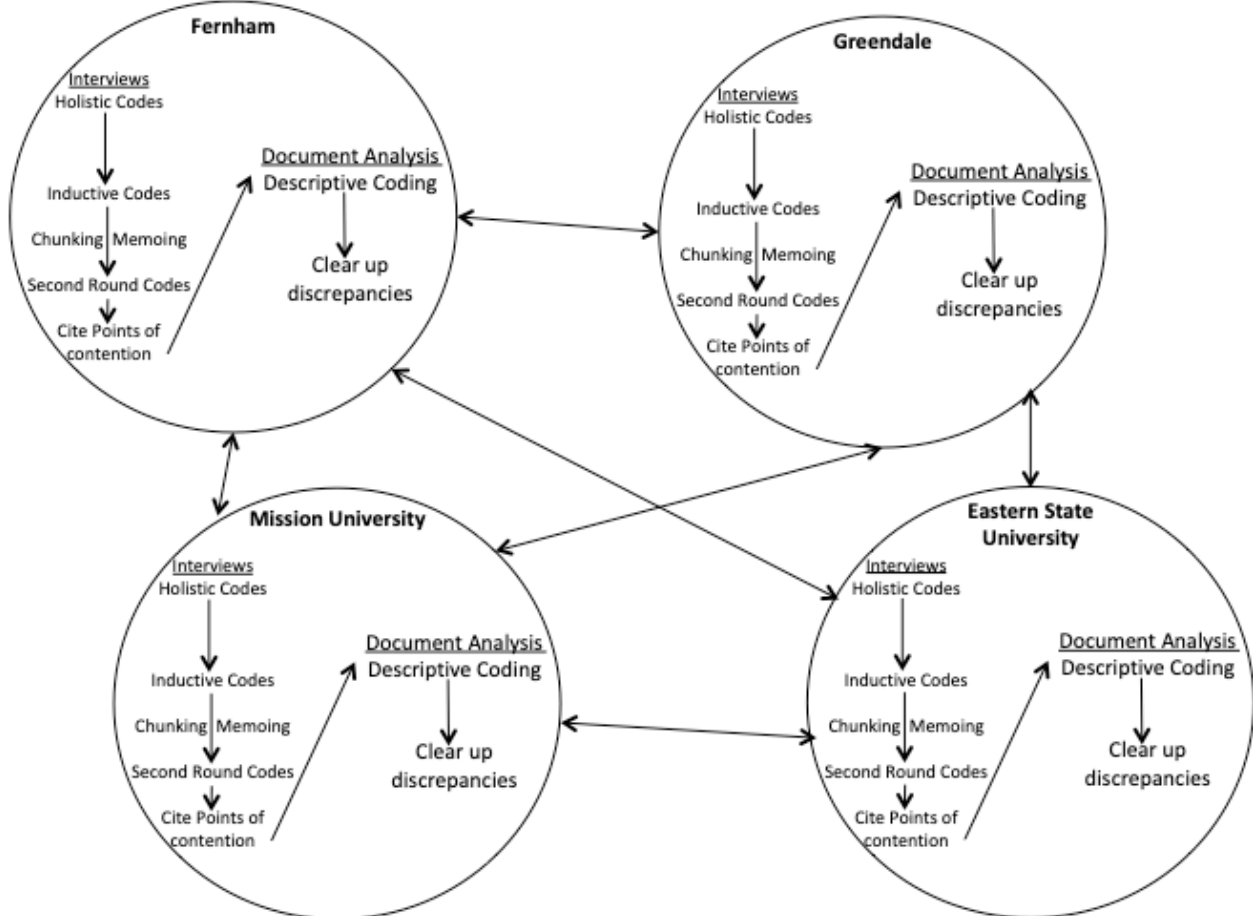


Table 1 (cont'd.)

		Was the program thriving, declining, or stagnant?	
	Do you know anything about how to major was founded?	When was it founded?	
		Who was involved?	
		What was the original mission of the major?	Was this connected to any larger college or university mission?
		Where was the major housed?	
Natural Shocks	Was there, at any point, a major shift in the program?	What was that shift?	
		When did that shift happen?	
		Why did this happen?	
		What sparked this change?	
		Who was involved?	
	Would these changes be recorded anywhere?	If so, where would these changes be recorded? Where could I find these materials?	
Positioning	What do you think about other interdisciplinary majors?	How would you compare this IDS program to other programs out there?	University of Michigan Whoever else you may compare yourself to.
	Where do you see this program going in the future?	In the next 3-5 years?	
	Are there any major changes coming up?	Tell me about those changes	
	Where do you see yourself in relation to the future of the program?		
What is the purpose of this major?			
Make sure you bring up these topics	Money, persistence, commitment to liberal arts, prestige	How do these affect organizational choice and challenges in the program?	

## Appendix B: Analytical Approach

Figure 2: Analytical Approach



## Appendix C: Codebook

Table 2: Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
External Influences	i.e. Market forces, Government, Accrediting Agencies, Disciplinary Associations	15	64
Internal Influences		41	794
Competition between Departments	Inductive code. Relationship between IDS and other departments. Not always “competition”	25	123
Institutional Influences	i.e. College Mission, Resources, Governance	36	317
Unit Level Influences	i.e. Faculty, Discipline, Student Characteristics	39	323
Leadership	Role of leaders in organizational change.	21	140
Natural Shock	The Change Event	24	191
Positioning	How the program sees itself in relation to other programs (other IDS, other IDS on campus, other disciplinary majors on campus)	35	204
Professional Development	Track individual professional development and professional history.	29	406
Adjunct vs. Tenure	Adjunct life vs. Tenure life. How the two interact with each other.	17	144
Programmatic History	History of the program. Includes the nut and bolts of the major. Requirements.	28	290
Purpose	What is the purpose of the major?	37	183
Rigor	Discussion of rigor and success.	41	400

## Appendix D: List of Participants by University

Table 3: List of Participants by University

University	Participant	Role At Time of Interview
Eastern State University	Sam Winters	Director
	Alvin Mack	Adjunct Faculty
	Ray Griffen	Retired Adjunct Faculty
	Joe Kane	Adjunct Faculty
	Autumn Haley	Adjunct Faculty
	Darnell Jefferson	Adjunct Faculty
	Steve Lattimer	Academic Advisor
	Brad Harvey	Incoming Director
	Richard Fowler	Retired Adjunct Faculty
	Camille Shafer	Former director
	Bobby Collins	Former director
	Sharon Braver	Director of Administration
	Tim Waymen	Retired Adjunct Faculty
	Charles Shane	Dean
Fernham	Mandy Pepperidge	Associate Provost for Curricular Development
Mission University	Julian Eaves	Academic Advisor
	Dean Grady	Dean
Greendale	Abed Nadir	Director
	Jeff Winger	Former director
	Britta Perry	Adjunct Faculty
	Troy Barnes	Adjunct Faculty
	Dean Pelton	Chair: Faculty for Educational Planning Committee
	Annie Edison	Adjunct Faculty

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