To: Denise Scheberle, Interdisciplinary Studies Program Chair

From: Christine Style, Chair of AAC

Date: 12 April, 2010

Re: Academic Affairs Council Review of Interdisciplinary Studies Program

Introduction
The Interdisciplinary Studies Program has a strong mission statement that underscores, follows and supports the select Mission of UWGB. Critical thinking, communication skills and interdisciplinarity are primary focuses for the ISP, which provides a diverse educational experience, as well as developing skills that contribute to the intellectual, cultural and economic communities of northeastern Wisconsin. Through the Office of Adult Degree Programs, the IST Program seeks to reach non traditional adult students, an often underserved student population, through the use of alternate methods of course delivery that allows students to learn at their own pace or while maintaining employment. Their program underscores the importance of a liberal arts education, with an emphasis on a wide range of specific courses that support general education as a legitimate and worthwhile pedagogical model. By providing two degree options, one of which recognizes the previous academic achievement and experience of degree candidates, students are able to customize their educational experience in order to better serve their individual professional goals.

The committee commends and congratulates the Interdisciplinary Studies Program for crafting such a well-written, organized and effective report, which will serve as an example for all program reviews to follow.

Program Accomplishments / Strengths
The Interdisciplinary Studies Program has clear, well-articulated learning objectives with substantiated positive results evidenced in student surveys. Constructive changes made to the program since the last review have provided clarity in terms of expectations for the students both at the beginning of their studies and at the end. Introductory seminars serve to articulate the expectations of the learning objectives to students at the outset of their degree program and capstone seminars are then used in the final semesters to effectively measure the student’s final comprehension and achievement of these goals. Since the last review, increased opportunities have been created for different emphases within the degrees offered, and there is the potential for continued expansion in this regard as more emphases are added to the program. An increased number of course offerings have been made available to students, including more alternative format classes, such as Internet-based courses.

An instructional development specialist was hired since the last review to assist faculty in the development of Internet based courses. The IST Program has also created Web seminars for faculty on teaching for Adult Degree classes, and they have demonstrated a
commitment to faculty training in this area. The acquisition of Mediasite software helps to facilitate the creation of online lectures and other class materials.

There is a high level of faculty involvement in the Interdisciplinary Studies and Adult Degree Programs. The programs have a strong advisory committee comprised of members of several academic units, and the program itself functions on a collaborative model with several academic units. The review narrative demonstrates an awareness of the program’s strengths and weaknesses, and contains proactive plans that seek to address these concerns, both in the future and between the past and current reviews.

They also possess an effective evaluation method that generates illustrative and useable data on the program’s goals and learning objectives, and students are well satisfied with the IST major.

Program Concerns

The AAC identified three areas where there were concerns and posed them as questions to the IST executive committee.

In the survey provided with the review, students indicated they do not adequately understand the importance of fine arts in their education. The IST responded that the program felt that adding an additional fine arts course in the core classes was not the best solution, given the current array of courses in the curriculum. Instead, they believe they need to do a better job communicating the importance of fine arts in a liberal arts education and the learning outcomes for the IST major to their students. Three credits of Fine Arts is the current general education requirement. However, they would recommend additional fine arts courses for IST majors as elective credit, as a way of gaining a greater appreciation for and understanding of the arts. They would also welcome the development of additional alternative formatted fine arts classes to help fill out this area of their program. The executive committee also offered the following interpretation of the survey data:

We noted, too, that IST alumni responding to the alumni survey were more likely than respondents as a whole to feel that they had an excellent or good understanding of at least one fine art (77% of IST alumni agreed, mean 3.9; 52% of UWGB alumni agreed, mean 3.5), but they were no more likely than their UWGB counterparts to view the fine arts as important (only 23 percent of both groups agreed). Graduating seniors, on the other hand, were somewhat less likely (32% to 37% from all UWGB respondents) to perceive a proficiency in the fine arts (though the mean was the same at 2.2); however, they were more likely to see the contribution that of the fine arts to general education (39% compared with 31%).

Students also indicated in the survey that they do not adequately understand the importance of the sciences in their education. The IST program replied that they feel that there are currently many options available for meeting this requirement, and this question may be due to a misunderstanding of the way the curricular requirements were reported. Regarding the science requirements for the General Education program, they have several course options available each semester across the HB1, HB2, NPS1, and NPS2 areas. The intent here is to reflect the options available to all students in
meeting the 12 credit natural sciences requirement. If the question refers to the upper-level science course requirements that are part of the IST major (though only part of the BA option), then the program offers a number of upper-level courses available across different areas of science (e.g., HUM BIOL, NUT SCI, ENV SCI, CHEM). As more science courses are delivered in alternative format, this should increase the breadth of course offerings for IST majors. At the present time, however, the executive committee states that students do have options for meeting the science requirement. The executive committee also offered the following interpretation of the survey data:

The IST alumni were more likely to agree that they understood biology and the physical sciences that the UWGB alumni as a whole (68% compared to 46%; means 3.6 and 3.3 respectively). They were also more likely to report an understanding of the impact of science and technology (63% to 46%). Graduating IST majors were somewhat less likely to profess a proficiency in biology and the physical sciences (19% to 22%; means 2.0 and 1.9 respectively).

Another concern raised by the AAC centered on the tremendous growth the IST Program has experienced since the past review. Given that Interdisciplinary Studies has seen tremendous growth since the past review, it was asked if there any plans in terms of sustaining this trend? Does the Interdisciplinary Studies have a strategic plan for their programmatic growth, or is the current growth rate expected to level off to a sustainable level once the backlog of the target student demographic has matriculated?

The IST Executive committee responded that they currently are making efforts to manage the present growth levels, with the understanding that this rate of growth will not last forever. The program is taking measured steps to add courses and areas of emphasis, while also understanding that academic units are strapped for resources. The Adult Degree Program is deeply committed to working closely with interdisciplinary units and disciplinary programs to identify additional instructors and opportunities for alternative delivery courses. For example, in consultation with budgetary unit chairs, the IST has identified outstanding emeriti faculty to teach in the major.

While the program expects the wave of interest in the IST major to stabilize over the next several years, they also anticipate that the number of nontraditional students being served through Adult Degree Programs will continue to grow due to other programming developments and collaborations with other academic units (e.g., other online/alternative degree options). The bottom line is that growth in the program will be managed with cooperative and supportive partnerships with budgetary units who will help them to identify faculty (both current and former) and adjunct instructors who represent the best teachers in the field.

Additionally, the Adult Degree Program has added another instructional technology staff member to support the on-line course development and delivery.

CC: Dean Scott Furlong
AAC