Date: May 4, 2010

To: Denise Scheberle  
   Chair, Interdisciplinary Studies

From: Scott Furlong  
   Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Re: Report on the Interdisciplinary Studies Program Review

The Interdisciplinary Studies (IST) program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay is an interdisciplinary program with three emphases (with two more recently started). The program serves the nontraditional student population primarily through alternative delivery methods. The program provides two degree options: the Bachelors of Applied Studies, which primarily serves students who have earned an applied associates degree and a Bachelors of Arts degree. A large and wide array of faculty from nearly every interdisciplinary budget department teaches for the IST program. As noted by the Academic Affairs Council (AAC), the IST programs have a strong commitment to a liberal arts education and also have very clear learning outcomes associated with this commitment.

Enrollment Trends/Resource Issues:
The IST program has experienced tremendous growth since its last review. This growth is due to a variety of factors including improved marketing as well as the beginning of the BAS degree. The most recent data shows over 200 majors in both the BA and BAS degree programs. This represents a 50% increase in the BA program. The BAS program did not exist at the time of the last review. The program relies on UW-Green Bay faculty, ad hocs, and emeriti faculty to cover their classes. As noted by the IST report, in 2006 they offered 46 courses and in the 2008/09 academic year this had more than doubled to 93 courses. The Adult Degree program has been able to add staff to support the increase in students. The growth is very impressive and corresponds with the university's current enrollment plan to increase access and the enrollment of nontraditional students. The AAC raises the issue of this growth and its sustainability. I have also raised this issue over the past few years stating my concerns of overtaxing our faculty. There have been initial discussions about how to address these issues to ensure courses for the program without overburdening the existing faculty. This year, IST hired a full time lecturer in Humanistic Studies to partially address this concern.

Assessment:
The IST has an impressive assessment program in place that is build directly into its curriculum. This is done through their Adult Degree Capstone Seminar, which assesses specifically the
meaning of a liberal education. This concept is introduced in the Adult Degree Entrance Seminar and is revisited and assessed during the Capstone through a "retrospective standpoint" using two written assignments.

The AAC raised a couple of issues relating to students responses regarding the need for Fine Arts in their general education and to some extent the importance of sciences in their education. IST responded to the AAC questions on this by commenting on the number of options available in these categories and an interest to expanding options within the Fine Arts and science areas. The requirements for the IST students are the same as our traditional students, although there may be fewer course options to meet these requirements. If the issue is one of choice, then the IST is appropriate and they are working towards a solution. I would like to raise the point though that perhaps this is not so much an issue of lack of "options" as much as a need to clarify the value of these courses within the IST and general education program for the students. Students within IST tend to emphasize areas within the social sciences and perhaps are not grasping fully the value of courses outside of this area and the relationship to their overall education. This is likely not a unique concern for the IST programs, but it is possible that IST is in a good position to address this.

Curriculum Development:
The biggest change to the IST curriculum in recent years has been a movement to develop more coherent emphases within the IST major. Emphases have been added in Organizational Communication, Emergency Management, Human Development, and Environmental Policy Studies. There are plans to develop more of these emphases in the future. Another change has been the elimination of courses (other than the entry and capstone seminars) that were only serving IST students. Now the courses mirror the curriculum for the traditional students.

Discussions continue regarding the offering of more of the university's traditional majors through the Adult Degree program. As we move toward these options, it may have an effect on the number of students majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies, but the role of Adult Degree will be critical.

In summary, the IST program has a very healthy number of majors with faculty from the range of academic programs on campus. The program serves an important and growing need for the nontraditional student, which has been recognized by the campus in its enrollment management plan. They have an intentional assessment plan. There are expectations for further curriculum development to add additional emphases in the future to better serve the students. If you would like to meet with me regarding this review, please let me know.

Cc: Christine Style, Academic Affairs Council
    Tim Sewall, Associate Provost