Interdisciplinary Graduate Study

Interdisciplinary study involves the combining of two or more academic disciplines through sharing theory, methodology, and applications. A student wishing to engage in interdisciplinary graduate study must therefore associate with multiple academic units. The following stipulations will govern the administration of interdisciplinary graduate study at BYU:

Operational Issues

The request for interdisciplinary graduate study must be initiated by the student, who must seek out faculty members who are interested and willing to serve as advisors. Once such connections are made, the student will need to constitute a formal advisory committee and establish a program of study. Since such arrangements will typically cross departmental and even college boundaries, the coordination and approval of all involved departments and colleges is essential. Establishing coordination requires the following definitions.

- Student's home department: The department in which the student resides.
- Advisor's home department: The department in which the advisor resides.
- Host department: The department that houses the degree program.

The following proposed principles govern the establishment of an interdisciplinary student's advisory committee chair:

- A request for assigning a chair outside the student's home department must originate with the student.
- Each request for interdisciplinary graduate study must be submitted to Graduate Studies as a formal proposal. A Request for Interdisciplinary Graduate Study form, ADV Form 1 (https://gradstudies.byu.edu/file/adv-form-1) must be jointly prepared by the student's home department, the advisory committee chair's home department, and the host department.
- There will be no standing approvals for faculty members to serve as graduate faculty members outside of their home departments.
- A faculty member serving as the advisor of a student not in the advisor's home department must meet the graduate faculty standards of the host department.
- Both the home and the host departments must agree that the faculty member has the expertise to guide the student's research.
- All approvals are mandatory. If anyone objects, the proposal cannot go forward.
- The procedures will apply among all academic units across the university.
- Precedent is not acceptable as justification for trying to accomplish these ends in some way other than as described herein.

The student's program of study must be approved by both the student's home department and the host department. Progress will be jointly assessed by the student's home department and the advisory chair's home department. The home department will enter the evaluations in AIM. The student is not expected to simultaneously meet all requirements of all departments. Rather, it must be recognized that the study is interdisciplinary. Achieving this approval will require the student to submit persuasive justification for the changes from the host department's regular degree requirements. The student must convince the host department that he/she possesses additional breadth and depth from his/her home department that will compensate for the possible lack of breadth and depth relevant to the host department. The host department, in conjunction with the student's home department, may need to compose a special qualifying exam for the interdisciplinary student.

Administrative Issues

Allowing students and faculty to function outside their own departments can have consequences that are difficult to predict. To ensure compatibility and accountability, approvals must be obtained for all concerned parties.

- The faculty home department will have to consider the workload of the faculty member just as they would when making an additional assignment for a student in their own department.
- The host department does not assume any of the valuation of a hosted faculty member for rank and status, salary, etc.
- The host department does not assume any of the compensation of a hosted faculty member.
- The involved departments will have to agree up front who will cover research costs, student funding, and which department will receive the student count for Graduate Studies/college funding allocations.
- The two college deans may use the signature line just for information, or they may impose any kind of criteria they wish.