
Memorandum

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TO: Senate

FROM: Mr. Stephen Strople, Secretary-General

SUBJECT: Open Discussion: “Breaking Down Silos: Interdisciplinary Collaborations”

DATE: February 6, 2014

DOCUMENT #: D13-45

ACTION REQUIRED: INFORMATION APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE: For the purpose of this discussion, we are using “interdisciplinary collaboration” to include trans-, inter-, multi- and/or cross-disciplinary collaborations. Students and academic staff members have articulated an interest in pursuing interdisciplinary collaborations in both teaching/learning and research to more adequately address complex problems. Potential benefits of such collaborations include broader and more diverse learning experiences and research initiatives. Enabling interdisciplinary collaboration often necessitates working around institutional, Faculty, discipline-based and Departmental boundaries. The goal of this discussion is to identify boundaries and barriers to the pursuit of interdisciplinary collaboration and to consider ways to reduce and eliminate these.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE: This topic was identified during the Steering Committee’s consultation on potential open discussion topics in Fall 2013.

The discussion is intended to focus on two sets of questions:

- 1) What factors act as obstacles or barriers to:
 - a) interdisciplinary teaching and learning for faculty members and students?
 - b) interdisciplinary research for faculty members and students?

For example:

- Recognition and reward mechanisms for tenure-track faculty members
 - Discipline-specific academic program requirements and regulations
 - Program regulations on majors and minors
 - Discipline-specific discourse and terminology (i.e., language barriers)
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- Professional accreditation requirements
- Timetable logistics and classroom scheduling
- Divergent academic standards and grading policies among Faculties, Schools and Departments
- Availability of appropriate funding and space
- Absence of institutional infrastructure to encourage, enable and foster interdisciplinarity

2) In the current context, what are practical next steps (i.e., initiatives) the University could take to better enable and promote interdisciplinary teaching/learning and research collaborations? For example:

- Development and approval of additional structured interdisciplinary academic programs
- Establishment of new incentives for interdisciplinary teaching and research collaborations
- Improvement of administrative procedures that will facilitate students registering for courses outside their field of study
- Revision of University policies and regulations to encourage greater interdisciplinary research
- Proactive efforts by the University (e.g., via OSR) to encourage and enable interdisciplinary research and teaching (e.g., develop a database like the Harvard Catalyst to better link the diverse faculty members at the University, use seed funding to enable new collaborations, develop/record Ted Talk-like seminars at the University to educate McGillians about the research and teaching innovations happening at the University, etc.).

MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL:	N/A
PRIOR CONSULTATION:	N/A
NEXT STEPS:	To be considered by the Steering Committee based on the Senate open discussion.
APPENDICES:	N/A
