

INTERDISCIPLINARY LIBERAL ARTS



COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2018 I-LA BROADSIDE

NEWS, STUDENT STORIES, INSTRUCTOR GREETINGS & CURRICULA UPDATES

I-LA DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In March, we sat down with the director of the Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts major, Kevin Foskin, and we asked him a few questions about what this emerging new academic experience called Interdisciplinarity is all about. Here's a little sample of what he had to say:

I-LA: But Interdisciplinarity sounds different than, say, other departments in the college, say Sociology or English. Is it?

KF: Well, yes and no. Yes, it is different because Interdisciplinarity is understood today less as a specialized topic and more so as a practice or a specific approach to what we call a broader understanding. However, we're not different from more traditional departments in the sense that we all utilize teaching/classroom approaches and core liberal arts skills that are similar in design and purpose. But what makes us different is what we stress: (1) Integrative thinking, (2) Multi-disciplinary understanding, and (3) Successful Intelligence, which we define as having three modes: Creative, Analytical, and Practical.

I-LA: Can you say a bit more about what is meant by 'a broader understanding'?

KF: Of course. But first let me back track a moment and talk about four theories that are important to how Interdisciplinarity is now being conceived within the field. When we talk about broadening our understanding, there are a number of ways, or rather, tools, we prioritize in our curriculum. In general terms, we work with (1) complexity, (2) perspective, (3) common ground, and (4) integration. Again, it's important to realize we see Interdisciplinarity more about an involved practice than either a theory or a specific topic.

I-LA: I am curious about this idea of complex problems, and how they seem to be a starting point for an interdisciplinary approach. But don't academic disciplines also work with complex problems?

KF: Again, I am going to give you somewhat a yes and no answer. Yes, disciplines work with increasingly complex problems. In fact, one of the values of disciplinary knowledge is its ability to address increasing complexities that ultimately lead to major new discoveries and understandings. Complexity in this sense helps a discipline to focus and specialize in knowledge. Both are vitally important.

But the complexity we work with in Interdisciplinarity takes a different direction. We first identify a complex problem or issue that requires a broader understanding or solution than what any one discipline can provide or attain for us. Rather than vehicles for greater specialization, we see complex problems as vehicles—or, better still, bridges—that allow us to forge intellectual/practical solutions that exist outside any one disciplinary perspective.

I've come across a recent article by P. Sven Arvidson that talks about the virtue of reverence in Interdisciplinary Studies. He writes that "successful interdisciplinary research is intrinsically related to the human capacity for reverence in the face of complexity." I do like the sound of that, don't you?

I-LA ASC CORNER, Jessie Stewart



Mindfulness. Awareness. Presence. I wonder if, like me, you have been hearing these words more and more in popular culture and on campus. I began to research why this is and last month, I presented my findings at a regional advising conference. In the last decade, colleges and universities all over the nation have been updating

the names of their medical, counseling and health services departments to include the word "mindfulness" in them. For example, CSU created The Center for Mindfulness as part of our Health Network back in 2014. So why is this happening now? There are many factors for this, the first being that there is far greater support for scientific research on the topic. Medical professionals are finding interesting results in brain scans of people who practice mindfulness and publishing their findings in reputable medical journals. However, I think one of the main reasons institutions of higher learning are trying to highlight the concept of mindfulness is some of the data coming out of the American College Health Association. Each year the ACHA surveys students across the US about their health and well-being. Students are now self-reporting on their stress and anxiety at higher rates and anxiety is now diagnosed more often than depression (acha.org). This makes sense: students are facing more school debt than ever before in part because the US continues to cut funding for higher education leaving more of the cost burden to families. There is a lot of pressure to maintain and promote a positive and active digital presence in addition to one's analog life. Many students are just learning how to navigate work, new relationships, and what it means to be a scholar. And, students are really hard on themselves, believing they have to perform perfectly the first time they have tried something rather than appreciating the overall learning process. Colleges and universities are trying to develop strategies and provide services that can help reduce some of the strain on the psyche. And yet, these offerings can look like yet another thing students have to do, more homework to fit into already busy schedules. Mindfulness is not another task; it is a practice to show up more fully for yourself. If you are interested, just start small. Concentrate on your breath as you move from class to class. Notice without judgment when and why your nervousness gets stronger and try something new in the moment. Laugh more; it is a natural stress reducer. Download one of the hundreds of free apps on breathing or meditation. Visit the relaxation room at the Health Network and talk to the professionals there. CSU is a place for experimentation and discovery. This is your time to get curious about yourself and get support for managing stress. Available Resources:

CSU Center for Mindfulness: <https://mindfulness.colostate.edu/>
TILT workshops: <https://tilt.colostate.edu/learning/>
Grey Noise/Ambient Sound for studying: many links on YouTube

I-LA DEGREE REQUIREMENT CHANGES (FALL 2018)

I-LA Majors, there are a number of new degree requirements changes coming our way for Fall semester 2018. Especially for those of you who are planning on graduating in the fall, it is probably a good idea if you make an appointment with Jessie Stewart, your ASC, so she can go over the new degree requirement changes in regards to your graduation timeline. These new requirement changes were instigated for several reasons. First, we are always working to improve your academic experience. Second, we are always looking for ways to offer you required courses that use your time more efficiently. Finally, we are continually rethinking our degree requirements in the hope of finding new ways of better preparing you for the changing workplace/career environments you'll be heading towards after graduation.

So, what are these new changes? First, we are dropping the one-credit course LB 200: Research Methods at the sophomore level and we are adding a new one-credit course LB 490: Interdisciplinary Portfolio Workshop at the senior level. Second, we have added a three-credit junior level course: LB 392: Junior Seminar. LB 392 is designed to give you a better research opportunity than what LB 200 offered while also introducing you to Interdisciplinarity as a methods approach. In this new course, you will learn what Interdisciplinarity is and how working with it in an intellectual/research capacity will better prepare you for what we do in Senior Capstone.

Again, it is important that everyone checks in with Jessie at some point so she can help you navigate these new changes successfully.

STUDENTS' STORIES

MAURA WILLIAMS, I-LA MAJOR



Growing up I knew that I desired to have a career where I could better people's lives, if I was helping people in some way that I felt was meaningful I would be happy. When I got here to college, I floundered and changed my mind a million times. Finally, my junior year I found CSU and knew that I should transfer and pursue a degree in Apparel and Merchandising. But, throughout my first year and a half of being an Apparel and Merchandising student I found that even though I enjoyed learning about the fashion industry and all of its components, I knew that the pieces weren't fitting right. I realized I was more enticed by reading political news articles than fashion magazines. I felt scared that I was floundering again during my senior year. I have admired political figures throughout my life and their tenacity to make the world a stronger place for humanity to thrive in. I knew that I too wanted to pursue that dream through some political avenue. Then, this past October I came across the Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts major. After having spent almost three months in the major with a minor in Political Communications, I have seen a drastic change in how I am as a student. Not only do I participate more in

class but I enjoy working on my homework and seeking out information relating to my major just for my own pleasure. Had I not chosen to switch to the ILAR major I don't believe that I would have ever known the feeling of studying subjects that I am truly passionate about. Even though I was nervous about switching to a different major so late in the game I am so thankful that I did. After meeting my advisor, Jessie, and being able to witness her knowledge as my own mentor and the wisdom that my professors possess I can confidently say that my life has truly changed for the better not only in my academics but in my personal life as well. I can honestly say that I feel prepared for life after college because of the ILA major and the well-rounded education that it has provided me with.

JENNA VAN LONE, I-LS MINOR



Earlier this semester, I had been stressing about having things to put on my resume for my law school applications. I kept racking my brain for something unique that would set me apart from my peers. Luckily, one day I was walking to the busses when an internship flier caught my eye. The CEA Study Abroad flier offered law internships in a variety of countries for this summer and I immediately thought about how amazing it would be to get a law internship in Paris, France. I had thought about doing a study abroad semester, but I happen to be more a homebody and two months for the summer sounded like a good compromise for me. So, I took the flier and found out that the deadline to commit to the program was in just three days. There were applications to fill out, credit transfer forms to get signed, parents to convince, and the list just kept getting longer the more that I did. At first, I wasn't going to commit to the program unless I was sure that I would receive credit for it but the more I thought about it, the more I realized what an amazing opportunity this was. Who else gets to say they've gone to France to intern in a subject that they're passionate about? This was the perfect thing to put on my law school application and an incredible experience that I would be a fool to miss out on. With a lack of sleep and more coffee than I probably should have consumed, I finished everything I needed to in those three days and committed to this internship. The advisors were all extremely helpful and before I knew

it I was interviewing with a coordinator in France to try and place me in a law related internship that was best suited for me. I am so excited that this opportunity was available, and I cannot wait to eat all the bread and pastries that France has to offer. I will, of course, miss my good friends here and Daisy—my pretty darn cute dog—but then I'll have loads to tell everyone once I return at the end of the summer.



INTERDISCIPLINARY LIBERAL ARTS INSTRUCTORS' CORNER

KEVIN FOSKIN, DIRECTOR

Many of you I do know but for those I haven't yet had in class, greetings. Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts is the perfect major to explore so many different interests and specializations, not only for students but equally for the professors who teach Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts courses. Although my academic credentials are in literature (especially in the areas of Anglo-Irish/European Literature and Creative Writing), I have a number of other huge academic interests. Two being Interdisciplinarity and Film (both documentary and narrative). I would go so far even to argue that one of the best interdisciplinary platforms available today that help us better understand liberal arts perspectives and issues is the medium of film. Watching film provides us with remarkable opportunities for exploring complex human realities. Film has an amazing ability to engage our intelligence, our understanding, and our emotions in profound ways that expand universal citizenship and human empathy. In fact, I-LA is a proud partner in the ACT Human Rights Film Festival, which happens every spring here at Colorado State University. Also, we offer two courses that we share with the departments of Communication Studies and Journalism & Media Communication that feature film as a vehicle for a unique interdisciplinary learning experience. I teach both classes on a rotating basis with professors from both departments. In the semesters I'm teaching one or the other of these courses, I try and show as many contemporary films as is possible. For example, just last fall we watched documentary films that covered a wide range of topics such as 'my Indie-Rock star brother', national identity and genocidal erasure, Muhammad Ali & the Fight of the Century, Irish mothers, 'the person behind the camera,' even what it means to be a part of a contemporary modern dance company. If you enjoy watching films but you want to know more about how films work and what they can help us know and say about central issues important to the liberal arts, do consider taking one or both of our Film as a Liberal Arts courses. And if you do, I may be seeing you in class.



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