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ISSUES IN INTEGRATIVE STUDIES  
No. 20, pp. 103-122 (2002)

### How to Do Interdisciplinarity: Integrating the Debate

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**Abstract:** This paper develops a twelve-step process for interdisciplinary research. While individual researchers cannot be expected to follow all of these steps in every research project, the process alerts them to the dangers of omitting steps. Moreover, communities of interdisciplinary researchers should ensure that all steps are followed. The process draws upon earlier efforts by William (Bill) Newell and Julie Thompson Klein. It also draws inductively upon the debate concerning Newell's theory of interdisciplinarity in the last issue of this journal; all of the concerns raised during that debate find a place in this process. Finally, the paper illustrates how several classifications developed by the author facilitate interdisciplinary research.

IN THE 2001 NUMBER of *Issues in Integrative Studies*, William Newell (2001) put forward a novel theory of interdisciplinarity. This was critiqued by Stanley Bailin (2001), Julie Thompson Klein (2001), J. Linn Mackey (2001), Richard Carp (2001), and Jack Meek (2001). Newell suggested that his theory supported a certain multiple-step approach to performing interdisciplinary research. The respondents evinced varying degrees of discomfort with the suggested process. In particular, Bailin (2001) wondered why the steps were not defined concretely—as much as possible—in terms of, say, methods or theories, rather than in terms of harder to operationalize variables such as disciplinary perspectives (pp. 35–36). Carp worried that the Newell process was unintentionally exclusionary of many valuable interdisciplinary pursuits.

This debate is rich and varied, and the literature on interdisciplinarity would be well-served by its continuation. My article hopes to pinpoint several key areas of disagreement and discuss how these might become the subject of empirical investigation. Some organizing structure is thus desirable, so that the connections among all of these areas of disagreement can readily

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**Date created**

2002

**Subjects / Keywords**

Interdisciplinary research

Process

**Type of Item**

Article (Published)

**DOI**

<https://doi.org/10.7939/R3MP4VV2C>

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In its first year (May 2004-April 2005) it investigated the structural, fiscal, cultural and other barriers that exist in the various European countries which hamper interdisciplinary teaching and research.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the second year of this project (May 2005-April 2006) was the question of how interdisciplinarity figures, and is operationalized, in interdisciplinary research programmes involving the Humanities and the. The debates about disciplinarity, its merits and demerits, have been partly railroaded 'Interdisciplinarity' can be described in two ways: one, as a process where elements from different disciplines are integrated, in a

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