

Dear Interdisciplinary Taskforce-

We applaud your insightful and detailed plans for encouraging interdisciplinary research and teaching at the University of Colorado. We agree that bridging disciplines is a crucial part of our future, and that the initiatives you've proposed will provide the structural and policy changes that will encourage this.

Our response focuses on the "grass roots" level, and includes an aspirational description of a faculty-driven initiative to incentivize and facilitate interdisciplinary coursework between units. The proposed Academies and large research collaborations will enable CU to come together behind broad themes. However, we feel that there is an extraordinary amount of untapped potential from individuals or small teams of faculty which could greatly enrich our community. Removing barriers to cross-discipline work at this scale would energize our faculty and break down the silos which restrict CU's function as an intellectually connected university.

We focus on coursework, as a central activity in which all faculty participate. Our proposal describes a structure to connect and support faculty in developing and teaching interdisciplinary topics. The Center for Teaching and Learning would be a natural administrative home, and its goals to improve teaching mesh well with encouraging faculty to think broadly and work collaboratively. The Center would create opportunities for faculty to network, assist in course development and teaching, and provide quality control via a proposal review and assessment program. A pilot program could begin very small – even just a few courses – and grow in response to available resources. We feel confident that our faculty will enthusiastically embrace any opportunities.

Current barriers to interdisciplinary courses and co-teaching across units are primarily at the departmental level and are both logistical and attitudinal. The Taskforce recognizes this in their Big Idea: Creating a marketplace for student credit hours, and this proposal is wholly in agreement with these recommendations. Funding for replacement instructors might be crucial for some departments, although others may already have capacity without funding. As a current example, CU's First Year Seminar program offers 40-60 3-credit courses each fall, many of which are interdisciplinary. About half of these, representing 20 different units, are taught as standard teaching loads, and are offered at effectively no additional cost. Academic Futures proposes that faculty be given more freedom to choose teaching assignments. A program which highlights interdisciplinary courses might be a step towards this, with clearly defined goals and processes, at a relatively modest and controllable cost.

We attach a summary which may be of interest in visualizing an interdisciplinary course development program. Our hope is to directly tap the versatility and creativity of our faculty to reach our shared vision of an interdisciplinary future.

Erica Ellingson, Professor, Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences  
Daniel Jones, Senior Instructor, Honors Program

# A Faculty-Driven Interdisciplinary Course Development Program

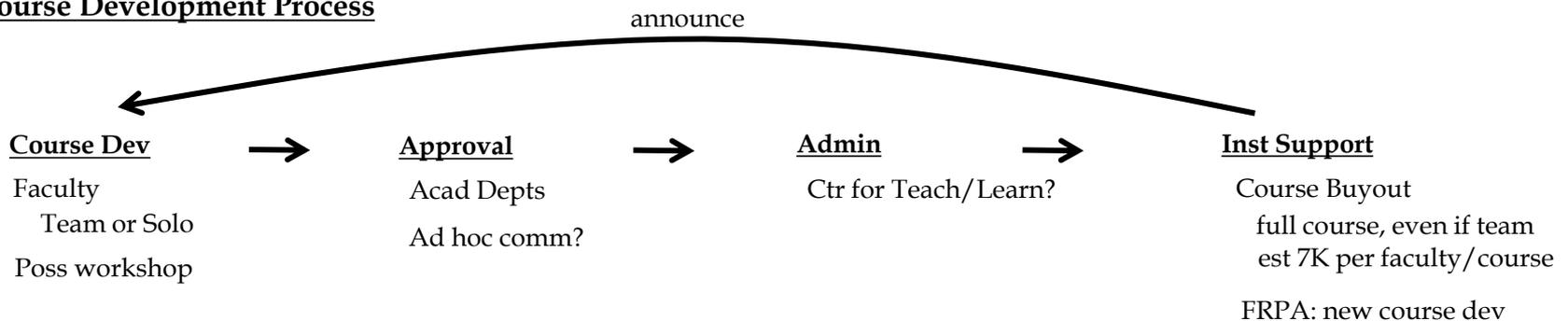
## Rationale

- **Innovate** new, esp. interdisciplinary, course topics which may incorporate into larger goals
- **Bridge A&S divisions** in creative ways
- **Implements Academic Futures** initiative to allow faculty more freedom in teaching
- **Addresses Interdisciplinary Taskforce Big Ideas:** e.g., creating a market for student credit hours
- **Follows up First Year Seminars initiative** on creative and interdisciplinary teaching
- **Scalable upwards** from pilot version

## Initial Goals

- **Develop new Gen Ed courses**, esp. for Diversity categories, in new disciplines
- **Enable teaching teams** initiated at the faculty level
- **Encourage new intellectual collaborations** between faculty
- **Implement in pilot program**

## Course Development Process



## Program Responsibilities

- **Sponsor workshops** to match faculty across divisional boundaries
- **Encourage cross-divisional faculty community**
- **Assist faculty** in designing new courses
- **Develop proposal and review process** to ensure academic quality
- **Enable interdepartmental coordination** for course approvals, scheduling and credit hours
- **Assess courses** for student learning and engagement, Interdisciplinary curriculum goals, faculty development
- **Help regularize courses** within larger interdisciplinary framework
- **Represent program** to campus and external communities

## Administration & Resources

- **Administer under the Center for Teaching and Learning** (keep it close to the faculty)
- **Potentially align with Academic Academies/Incubators**, but also facilitate ideas outside of the designated themes
- **Engage Interdisciplinary Centers**
- **Create faculty advisory and review board**
- **Incentivize faculty & departments** via course buyouts (~\$7K per buyout)
- **Suggest additional resources** for significant development and co-teaching
- **Fund workshops and other events**, course and classroom support
- **Fund administrative support**
- **Acknowledge in FRPA:** new course development, focus on interdisciplinary work

## Current Examples

### Nat Sci + Diversity Interdisciplinary

Toxic Chemicals and the Environment  
Health Communication in a Mediated World  
The Biology of Sex and Gender  
Cultural Astronomy  
Differential Health Care  
Ethnobotany

### Nat Sci + Other Interdisciplinary

Our Geologic Dependencies (GEO and ECON)  
Ethical Person, Ethical Engineer (PHIL and ENG)  
Earth (GEO and ENGL)  
Life on Mars (ASTR, GEO, BIO)  
Science & Art in an Interdisciplinary World (NEST)