

## **Creation of a Cross-Campus Faculty Committee for Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies**

Catherine Labio

### **Abstract**

The goal of this white paper is to strengthen interdisciplinarity across CU Boulder by proposing the creation of a nimble and flexible structure that will allow the campus to respond quickly and creatively to evolving interdisciplinary needs. Specifically, I propose the appointment of an interdisciplinary faculty committee tasked with reviewing existing and proposed centers on a regular basis and drafting a report, to be updated at regular intervals, on best practices for fostering cutting-edge scholarly and pedagogical interdisciplinary initiatives at CU Boulder.<sup>1</sup>

### **Proposal**

Existing centers tend to define interdisciplinarity too narrowly, either within a college or school or within a division of the College of Arts and Sciences. As a result, there is not always a clear path for cross-campus research and teaching initiatives (I think, for instance, of scholarly work at the intersection of business and the humanities and of the creation of interdisciplinary programs of study). In addition, existing centers may or may not perform at an optimal level, are not subject to sufficient faculty scrutiny, and can act as barriers to bottom-up initiatives that do not fit an existing and possibly dated mold, thereby strengthening the silo effect that is a major obstacle to interdisciplinary collaboration. In addition, centers' affiliation with specific schools or divisions is a matter of institutional history rather than scholarly and pedagogical logic. If we are truly committed to interdisciplinarity, we need to reassess our current institutional arrangements and replace them with a flexible infrastructure that will further the creation of new bridges and pathways as the need arises.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper "center" refers to centers, institutes, and any other similar unit.

I propose that all centers, including centers that are not interdisciplinary, be brought together under a campus-wide umbrella, i.e., a faculty Committee for Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies led by a faculty member who will report directly to the Chancellor or Provost and to the Executive Committee of the Boulder Faculty Assembly. The Committee will initially be tasked with the following:

- 1) devise procedures for the review and approval of proposals regarding the creation of new centers (with a preference for interdisciplinary initiatives) and the renewal of existing centers, including centers that are not interdisciplinary;
- 2) review and approve such proposals within a two-year period following the formation of the Committee;

As always, the devil will be in the details. At this point, I do wish to highlight some key principles:

- a) Not all centers need to be interdisciplinary. However, they should all be subject to a sunset clause of, say, 5 years. Their renewal should involve the same scrutiny as the review of new center proposals and include input from highly respected (paid) external reviewers;
- b) The appointment of center directors should be subject to term limits. Director appointments and reappointments should involve greater faculty and, wherever appropriate, graduate and undergraduate student input;
- c) Care should be given not to appoint or elect to the Committee faculty members with a strong vested interest in promoting an existing center. This means, for instance, that the head of the Committee should not be heading a center at the same time (or have done so in the recent past). More generally, Committee members will be expected to recuse themselves from deliberations and votes on initiatives they may be identified with, erring on the side of caution to avoid the appearance of impropriety and foster trust in the work of the Committee.

In addition to the tasks outlined above, the Committee will be responsible for drafting, either simultaneously or subsequently, a proposal—to be updated every 5 to 10 years—for the promotion of interdisciplinary studies at CU Boulder with respect to scholarship and pedagogy at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Matters the Committee may want to discuss include: the desirability of the creation of an Institute for Advanced Interdisciplinary Studies, the removal of obstacles pertaining to the appointment and promotion of faculty engaged in interdisciplinary study, and the creation of an interdisciplinary core and of individualized programs, majors, and minors in interdisciplinary studies.