

UCC Program Review Committee Summary of Review

Program: Individual Interdisciplinary Program

Date of last review: N/A

Date of this review: AY 2021-2022

The program offers the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- Ph.D. in IIP
- M.S. in IIP

Recommendation: This program is found to be viable.

See report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

The report was forwarded to the program's directors (incoming and outgoing) and the college dean. Their responses are attached.

The Graduate Council's comments are included as well.

Program Review Report
For
Individual Interdisciplinary Program (IIP)
Spring, 2022

Summary:

Internal reviewers, Dr. Glenn Dutcher (Associate Professor in Economics) and Dr. Lijing Yang (Associate Professor in Higher Education and Student Affairs), attended the virtual site visit for the Individual Interdisciplinary Program (IIP) on January 28, 2022. We met with former and current directors, faculty involved in the program, students, advisory committee, and Dean of Graduate College. The IIP does not have an external reviewer because it is not an independent department/program. Instead, it provides coordination and documentation to allow students the opportunity to pursue interdisciplinary graduate studies. In sum, the faculty and students all felt it was a great program and brought prestige to Ohio University. They also suggested many areas for improvement.

Overall, we found the IIP program as a whole is viable. We have identified the following areas of merits and concern and provided recommendations for future program development.

I. Merits.

The review committee has identified the following areas of merits:

1. There were many admirable qualities the faculty pointed out. The faculty members' involvement was driven by their desire to see their students succeed in pursuing a program that better fit the students' interests. They also raved about the importance of the program to bring prestige to the University, and some said they use the program to attract new faculty. They admitted the program was small, but "potential" was repeatedly used to describe the program. Many of them wanted to see the program grow as they were happy with their interactions with students in the program and other faculty connected to them through their student's interdisciplinary tract. It was also discussed as a program that brings previously siloed departments together. Some of the faculty do not have Ph.D. programs in their home department and are grateful for the chance to advise Ph.D. students through IIP.
2. The IIP program is also better suited to give students a more diverse knowledge set than field-specific graduate programs. It accommodates their schedules and provides a flexible course of study. The students were also very grateful for the program. Many would not have the chance to pursue a graduate degree without the IIP, given that their interests are not well aligned with traditional single-discipline programs.
3. The IIP program attracts students from diverse backgrounds, particularly international students. Many faculty pointed out that this diversity is increasingly important in their fields. The faculty perceived that the IIP program aligns with their view of the "future" of education where diversity of thought is valued.

4. The program has also been successful in helping students land desirable jobs both within and outside of academia. The students also enjoy working in an interdisciplinary program and feel it such a program aids in their intellectual development.

II. Areas of Concern

The committee has identified the following areas of concern:

1. The lack of funding for students is a concern. No financial aid, graduate assistantship or scholarship, is available for students in the IIP program. Due to the responsibility centered budgeting model, the unit does not receive revenue from the major or minor courses that the students registered. Most students in the program are OU employees who are eligible for educational benefit with tuition waiver at Ohio University. But for those international students and those who have no employee benefit, they have challenges to get funding to cover their tuition. The lack of funding also limits the program capacity from recruiting more students.
2. Despite potential market of attracting students with strong motivation in interdisciplinary interests, IIP program has only had approximately 5 PhD students and 3-6 master's students in each cohort in recent years. The size is relatively small in comparison with other graduate programs in the university.
3. Navigating the program across disciplines themselves can be challenging for some students. They sometimes got lost in the process. For example, one student was not clear regarding how to proceed her comprehensive exam.
4. Some students felt isolated and lack of socialization opportunities and peer interactions in the program of study.
5. Students also reported a lack of professional development opportunities in the IIP program. They are not able to access some professional seminars in the major programs where they take course from. They feel having a symposium in the IIP program or workshop with professionals in interdisciplinary field would be helpful, but the IIP program does not have such professional development activities.
6. Faculty who work with Honors Tutorial College may receive a small stipend, but faculty work with IIP student was seldom recognized or rewarded at their own department level. Faculty advising is often counted toward service. There is a lack of guidelines at local departments regarding how faculty may get recognition.
7. The IIP program-level learning outcomes are not clearly defined. Accordingly there was no assessment result of the program aligned with the learning outcomes.

III. Recommendations

The review committee recommends the following:

1. The review committee recommend the IIP program seek more diversified funding to recruit students and support current IIP students' tuition waiver and scholarship. One source of funding is philanthropy. The IIP program director and administrators may reach out to the university development office and deans of the Graduate College regarding fundraising. Additionally, IIP program may facilitate students seeking TA or GA opportunities in their

major programs or other units. Abundant funding may help the program attract more students, especially those traditional students and non-OU-employee students.

2. Given that IIP program has covered a unique area of student interdisciplinary interests in the market, we recommend the IIP program adopt more proactive strategies to recruit students and faculty. The program may renovate the design of the program website and promote greater publicity and visibility on the Graduate College's website. Another marketing strategy is to advertise the advantages of students in two or multiple fields in job replacement.
3. Considering the vague program-level learning outcomes, we recommend the IIP program articulate its mission to the faculty and students.
4. The review committee encourages localized policy and decision-making for academic departments across campus to enroll IIP students in departmental professional development seminars and accepting IIP students in their TA opportunities.
5. The University may promote interdisciplinary research projects among faculty, which will better engage IIP students in a more organic way to nurture student interest and professional development.
6. The IIP program may help each IIP student to identify an advisor who will consistently works with the student. In case that student initial program of study does not work due to reasons such as faculty leave, or department is restructured, the program and student advisors may help students develop a backup plan to safeguard students deal with this.
7. The program has changed directorship a few times in recent years. The new director may communicate with students and their faculty to assist a smoother transition for students and foster stronger connection between the program and students. The director may also use the program handbook to maintain program consistency.
8. To bring more consistency to faculty who advise IIP students, IIP should devise a best practices document outlining how other departments or colleges recognize and reward faculty who spend time advising IIP students. This document can aid faculty in educating others in their departments about the time commitment involved in mentoring students.
9. Because the program is interdisciplinary, the students do not have much interaction with senior-level interdisciplinary scholars. To help guide students, IIP should set up a recurring seminar series that allows faculty working on interdisciplinary research to highlight this research and connect with the students. These seminars can be composed of current faculty, faculty from other Universities, or former students. These seminars may also comprise professional development opportunities for the students.
10. Additionally, to help the students feel less isolated, regular get-togethers, which may occur at the beginning of each semester, should be organized by the director.



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February 15, 2022

To the UCC Program Review Committee:

In accordance with University Curriculum Council policy, we are offering this response to the Program Review Report on the Individual Interdisciplinary Program (IIP). We also thank the reviewers, Drs Dutcher and Yang, for their time and their care in learning about and evaluating the program's viability.

First, we are pleased that the reviewers agree that this program is viable and that both students and faculty in the program agree on its value. As the reviewers note, the IIP allows students to design a flexible and innovative program of study while also encouraging collaboration between Ohio University departments and colleges. This flexibility allows tailoring for specific job markets and increases diversity in both research and in the kind of students attracted by the program.

The Program Review does surface some areas of concern and some suggestions for addressing these. We thank the reviewers for these ideas and many of them are already part of our planning or can be easily adopted. Dr. Machtmes has agreed to a 3½ year term as Graduate Director, which is renewable for an additional 3 years if both she and the Graduate College wish. On the list of tasks for her prior to fall semester 2022 are to update and republish the Handbook and to create of a more visible and attractive webpage for the program. The Graduate College is setting aside a small amount of money for a program get-together each semester. Finally, Dr. Machtmes is planning more frequent check-ins with each guidance committee to track progress and answer questions.

We also agree that a formal program mission statement would be helpful to clarify the role and scope of the IIP. The program learning outcomes, however, are intentionally vague because they need to account for literally any combination of university disciplines. That said, our program assessment should probably not be restricted to evaluation of those final learning outcomes. We should be adding assessment measures related to students meeting appropriate milestones with a clear sense of direction, as well as whether the research that students are able to conduct meets their own expectations for what they need to gain from the degree.

We are less concerned with the size of the program or the availability of advising. The master's degree options are underused currently, which suggests that there is not enough awareness of the program. Dr. Machtmes is planning to do outreach within the university to help raise awareness of the IIP option. It is less clear that we should try to bring in more than five or six

Ph.D. students a year. Unlike most graduate programs, we do not have to worry about whether we have enough students to justify staffing the graduate-level curriculum. Beyond maintaining a sense of cohort to prevent isolation, aggressively increasing the size of the program would

need to be motivated by clear institutional goals. In terms of advising, it is our hope that the Handbook, seminars, and check-ins will make it clear that the Graduate Director is the program advisor for anything that is not in the domain of the Guidance Committee.

The question of funding for students or for faculty involved is one that we will leave for Dean Shields. Please let us know if additional information would be helpful.

Your truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Beth Quitslund".

Beth Quitslund
IIP Graduate Director (through Dec. 2021)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Machtmes".

Krisanna Machtmes
IIP Graduate Director (as of Jan. 2022)



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January 15, 2022

Re: Individual Interdisciplinary Program Review – Dean’s Response

I appreciate the thorough review and constructive feedback provided by Professors Dutcher and Yang for the Individual Interdisciplinary Program (IIP). The IIP enables students to pursue rigorous study and research that transcends the bounds of traditional disciplinary graduate programs. The IIP is unusual in its flexibility, interdisciplinary character, and reliance on contributions by faculty across the university. These attributes give rise to distinctive opportunities and challenges, many of which are highlighted in the review report. I concur with the reviewers’ assessment that the program is viable.

Drs. Quitslund and Machtmes have provided a response on behalf of the program, and I agree with their analysis and support the measures that they describe to address the report’s recommendations. There are several matters raised in the report that are more appropriately addressed at the college level.

A specific area of concern is the lack of financial support for stipends and tuition scholarships for students in the IIP. This situation is inherent for an interdisciplinary program given that most graduate assistantships funded by the university are tied to delivery of specific disciplinary curricula. There is no evident path to a sustainable model with expanded financial aid at the current time. As Dean I am interested in private philanthropy that can support the Graduate College’s programs, but there are similarly no clear donor prospects at present for the IIP. The program is able to function at the existing level through the investment of personal resources by participating students, and in a majority of cases, support available through educational benefits to OHIO employees. It appears likely that these elements will remain the basis for the IIP business model for the foreseeable future.

The report provides additional recommendations that speak to some of the challenges associated with a cross-cutting interdisciplinary program. These include the reward system for faculty who advise IIP students, the ability of IIP students to access professional development seminars with limited enrollment, and availability of seminars to showcase interdisciplinary research and scholarship. Similar issues have been surfaced by the Academic Planning and Strategy workgroups over the past year, which have produced recommendations for creating support systems for academic programs like the IIP that transcend traditional department and college boundaries. Follow-up steps to reduce obstacles for “horizontal” programs and collaborations are now in development, and I anticipate that these measures will help address the related issues identified in the IIP review.

Sincerely,

Joseph C. Shields
Vice President for Research & Creative Activity
Dean of the Graduate College

From: [Charlotte Elster](#)
To: [Such, Barbel](#)
Cc: [Elster, Charlotte](#)
Subject: Comments from the Grad Council
Date: Sunday, March 13, 2022 2:29:58 PM

NOTICE: This message was sent from outside Ohio University. Please use caution when clicking links or opening attachments in this message.

Hi Baerbel,

on March 4, the graduate council met and commented on the review for the following programs:

IIP: Graduate council concurs with the findings that the program is viable and that it has received high marks. we concur with the concerns, namely that the program needs some infusion of resources as far as students are concerned rather than staff or faculty. We agreed that the university should decide how to value this program and then follow the recommendations of the review.

At the moment it looks as if graduate council may cancel its April 1 meeting, so everything you send to me will be considered at the April 29 meeting.

viele Gruesse, Charlotte

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