

# Interdisciplinary Teaching and Collaboration in Higher Education: A Concept Whose Time Has Come

Anita Weinberg\*  
Carol Harding\*\*

*The modern teacher of law should be a student of sociology, economics and politics as well. He should know not only what the courts decide and the [legal] principles by which they decide, but quite as much the circumstances and conditions, social and economic, to which these principles are to be applied. . . . It is, therefore, the duty of American teachers of law to . . . give to their teaching the color which will fit new generations of lawyers. . . .*<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the idea of “interdisciplinary”<sup>2</sup> teaching and scholarship has become increasingly popular,<sup>3</sup> heralded as a means to

---

\* Clinical Professor and Director, ChildLaw Policy Institute, Civitas Childlaw Center, Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

\*\* Professor Emerita of Human Development and former Director, Center for Children, Families, and Community, Loyola University Chicago School of Education and the Developmental Psychology Program.

1. Roscoe Pound, *The Need for a Sociological Jurisprudence*, 31 ABA REPORTS 911, 917-21, 925-26 (1907), available at <http://www.law.ucla.edu/students/academicinfo/coursepages/s20001/337/roscoepound.html> (last visited May 3, 2003) (on file with the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy).

2. The use of terms such as “interdisciplinary,” “multidisciplinary,” “cross-disciplinary,” and “transdisciplinary” has generated debate in recent years. See, e.g., Mary C. Daly, *What the MDP Debate Can Teach Us About Law Practice in the New Millennium and the Need for Curricular Reform*, 50 J. LEGAL EDUC. 521, 522 n.3 (2002). For the purposes of this discussion, we have chosen to use the term “interdisciplinary” primarily because it is the label used by Loyola University Chicago to describe the courses and programs we have developed. The term also reflects the challenge of integrating information across disciplines and professions. Our use of this label, however, does not reflect any particular position on the recent debates.

3. See, e.g., Kim Diana Connolly, *Elucidating the Elephant: Interdisciplinary Law School Classes*, 11 WASH. U. J.L. & POL’Y 11 (2003); Kathleen Sullivan, *Foreword: Interdisciplinarity*, 100 MICH. L. REV. 1217 (2002); Janet Weinstein, *Coming of Age: Recognizing the Importance of Interdisciplinary Education in Law Practice*, 74 WASH. L. REV. 319 (1999); Heidi Gorovitz Robertson, *Methods for Teaching Environmental Law: Some*

dismantle the walls around academic disciplines, and praised by university presidents for the intellectual and administrative benefits that flow from interdepartmental collaboration.<sup>4</sup> Although drawing on the diverse elements of a university has obvious appeal, there has been little systematic examination of the goals and challenges of interdisciplinary education to date, particularly from the perspective of faculty and students who plan and participate in these programs. In this Article we explore the issue of interdisciplinary teaching based on our experiences as a lawyer and social scientist who, for the past several years, have collaborated in the development, teaching, and evaluation of interdisciplinary courses at Loyola University Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

---

*Thoughts on Providing Access to the Environmental Law System*, 23 COLUM. J. ENVTL. L. 237 (1998); Barbara Blechner et al., *The Jay Healey Technique: Teaching Law and Ethics to Medical and Dental Students*, 20 AM. J.L. & MED. 439 (1994); Dale L. Moore, *An Interdisciplinary Seminar on Legal Issues in Medicine*, 39 J. LEGAL EDUC. 113 (1989); Cyril M. Harris & Albert J. Rosenthal, *The Interdisciplinary Course in the Legal Aspects of Noise Pollution at Columbia University*, 31 J. LEGAL EDUC. 128 (1981).

4. See, e.g., Sullivan, *supra* note 3, at 1221-22. Loyola University Chicago lists its first strategic goal for 2002-2004 as supporting and focusing "LUC's educational mission to undergraduates in a manner that is increasingly known for its *holistic and integrated academic programs*, its striving for excellence in all endeavors, and its engagement with the wider community through service and learning." LOYOLA UNIV. CHICAGO, STRATEGIC GOALS FOR LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO: 2002-2004, at para.4 (emphasis added), at <http://www.luc.edu/about/plan.html> (last visited Aug. 17, 2003) (on file with the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy). While Loyola Chicago's law school is in the process of rewriting its strategic goals, an open letter from the Dean, published on its website, states: "We understand that our graduates will serve not only as litigators, but also as counselors, mediators, arbitrators and, most important of all, as policy makers. The law school continues to provide an innovative curriculum *which draws upon the interdisciplinary strength of the larger university*." Letter from Nina S. Appel, Dean, Loyola University Chicago School of Law, to prospective law students, at para. 2 (undated) (on file with the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy). In addition, the law school has established three programs—the Child and Family Law Center, the Institute for Health Law, and the Business Law Center—that prepare students for both specialization and interdisciplinary collaboration.

5. The authors are both faculty members at Loyola Chicago. Anita Weinberg is a Clinical Professor and the Director of ChildLaw Policy and Legislative Programs at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. She also oversees the dual-degree J.D.-M.S.W. program and interdisciplinary activities between the law school's ChildLaw Center and the broader University community—schools and departments engaged in the study of children and families. Prior to working at Loyola Chicago, Professor Weinberg was an adjunct faculty member at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration for nine years, where she developed and taught a course on Social Work and the Law. Carol Harding (currently Professor Emerita) served from 1980 to 2000 as Professor of Human Development in the School of Education and the Developmental Psychology Program. In addition, she directed the Center for Children, Families, and Community, an interdisciplinary applied research center. Professors Harding and Weinberg have developed, co-taught, and evaluated interdisciplinary courses

Although the views shared here are specifically those of two faculty members involved in interdisciplinary coursework, we have attempted to ground our discussion in the relevant research literature and in the experiences of students and other faculty engaged in these efforts with us. It is our objective to describe our experiences (both the challenges and the lessons learned) as a way to stimulate further discussion and to increase not only the commitment to interdisciplinary higher education, but also the effectiveness of its implementation.

This inquiry comes at a time of rapid change and new challenges in higher education. Accreditation commissions, such as the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association,<sup>6</sup> acknowledge the challenge of establishing standards to meet the changing needs and designs of higher education.<sup>7</sup> But as new standards are developed to ensure the quality of innovative programs, it is important that they reflect the experiences of students and faculty actively involved in interdisciplinary education.<sup>8</sup> It is our hope that

---

together for more than five years. This Article is their first interdisciplinary publication, and it reflects some of the style differences and other discipline-specific conventions of their two disciplines, law and developmental psychology.

6. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association is the accrediting body for our institution, Loyola University Chicago.

7. See Robert C. Albrecht, *Accreditation in the Uncertain World of Higher Education: Old and New Approaches*, available at <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/restructuring/Albrecht.pdf> (last visited Sept. 10, 2003) (on file with the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy). In his article, Albrecht concludes: "The traditional academic patterns have changed and require interpretations, if not new definitions, to match them. . . . The measurement of quality, particularly the measurement of learning, can be achieved through the assessment of evidence by peer review. But the statements by which quality and learning are measured must be clear and applicable to an institutional world of greater variation." *Id.* at paras. 22-23. Apropos of the challenges to integrating the goals and objectives of different disciplines, neither the ABA's standards for accrediting law schools, nor the interpretations of the standards, make mention of interdisciplinary education. In addition, while the standards require that law schools offer students live-client or other real-life practice experiences—opportunities that may provide interdisciplinary interactions—they do not require that the experience be offered to all students. ABA, STANDARDS FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHOOLS, Standard 302(d) (2000). See also Dina Schlossberg, *An Examination of Transactional Law Clinics and Interdisciplinary Education*, 11 WASH. U. J.L. & POL'Y 195 (2003) (discussing the debate over multidisciplinary practice).

8. As observed by Albrecht, standards for measuring quality, at times, "must be interpreted by members of teams who have often been unfamiliar with the new structures. Further, the interpretations may or may not be those of the institutional representatives themselves." Albrecht, *supra* note 7, at para. 21.

the viewpoints presented here contribute to a better understanding and interpretation of interdisciplinary education.

Scholarly literature related to the value of interdisciplinary education has recently expanded to include excellent review articles reflecting the generalized assumption that interdisciplinary education, at least in theory, is a shared value among university academicians.<sup>9</sup> While attempting to apply this value within the university classroom, however, we have experienced challenges that may be shared by others attempting to put into place what appears to be a commonly shared commitment to interdisciplinary education. Actually *practicing* interdisciplinary higher education (as opposed to *advocating* for it) is difficult, particularly given traditional university structures and the professional education that most of us, including faculty and students, have undergone, thereby socializing us into specific and, at times, isolated idiosyncratic disciplines.

We begin this discussion with a brief overview of the history of interdisciplinary education, particularly as it relates to teaching in law schools. We then discuss the goals of interdisciplinary education, with an emphasis on the cognitive and social significance of interdisciplinary thinking for students, faculty, and professionals. Several organizing assumptions follow that guided and, in some cases, emerged from our interdisciplinary efforts over the last six years to develop an interdisciplinary agenda within our university. Next, we identify patterns in interdisciplinary higher education (based on our own experiences), as well as the challenges and rewards for faculty and students that accompany such patterns. Finally, we integrate students' evaluative comments as we describe some lessons learned to this point in the ongoing process of developing interdisciplinary programs.

## I. BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERDISCIPLINARY LEGAL EDUCATION

While practitioners and academicians today view interdisciplinary teaching and collaboration as a fairly recent phenomenon, in fact, as far back as 1907, American legal educators postulated about the importance of interdisciplinary understanding and the challenges

---

9. *E.g.*, Connolly, *supra* note 3, at 25-26.

faced when seeking knowledge and information outside the law. In 1907, Roscoe Pound cautioned against legal educators becoming “legal monks.”<sup>10</sup> Pound argued that American teachers of law should know not only court decisions and the principles upon which they were based, but also the “circumstances and conditions, social and economic, to which these principles are to be applied . . . .”<sup>11</sup>

Sixteen years later, in his Dean’s Report for Columbia University, Harlan Fiske Stone lamented the failings of legal educators to recognize the importance of “the subject matter of economics and the social sciences generally”<sup>12</sup> to the law. Stone involved his faculty in a reorganization of the Columbia Law School curriculum along lines that provided for interdisciplinary understanding.<sup>13</sup> Although Stone’s design for integrating the expertise of other disciplines ultimately failed, Robert Stevens, in his history of legal education in America, credits Stone for his vision and for influencing further experimentation in succeeding years.<sup>14</sup>

Herman Oliphant, a Columbia faculty member, acknowledged in 1928 the role of non-legal studies in keeping the development of the law “more nearly in step with the complex developments of modern life.”<sup>15</sup> Oliphant understood the importance of collaboration in this effort, arguing that legal education required a fresh approach—merely broadening the current curriculum or adding social science courses was not enough.<sup>16</sup> Oliphant also recognized the challenges of interdisciplinary collaboration, noting that it “involves critical, constructive, creative work by both faculty and students rather than a regime devoted primarily to the acquisition of information.”<sup>17</sup>

---

10. Pound, *supra* note 1, at 1.

11. *Id.*

12. ROBERT STEVENS, LAW SCHOOL: LEGAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA FROM THE 1850S TO THE 1980S, at 137 (1983) (quoting Brainerd Currie, *The Materials of Law Study, Part III*, 8 J. LEGAL EDUC. 1, 10-11 (1955)).

13. *Id.* at 138.

14. *Id.* at 137-38 (Stevens provides a comprehensive and readable history of legal education in this country). Also, see JEROLD S. AUERBACH, UNEQUAL JUSTICE LAWYERS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MODERN AMERICA (1976), for an account of the historical role of lawyers and legal education as it relates to social justice.

15. STEVENS, *supra* note 12, at 138 (citing HERMAN OLIPHANT, SUMMARY OF STUDIES IN LEGAL EDUCATION BY THE FACULTY OF LAW OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY 20-21 (1928)).

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

Not all legal-education commentators have shared these views on the value of integrating interdisciplinary perspectives into a law school curriculum. In his 1930 Report of the Dean, Columbia's Dean Smith discussed the frustrations inherent in undertaking interdisciplinary efforts and the comfort of the "settled and orderly domain of the law."<sup>18</sup> In 1934, while president of the University of Chicago, Robert M. Hutchins not only echoed Smith's frustration, but also noted the limits of the field of psychology in advancing the practice of law.<sup>19</sup>

Other commentators, however, have suggested that the social sciences were not always to blame. John Henry Schlegel, for example, has argued that legal academics neither understood nor knew how to use the quantitative and statistical methods developed by the social scientists.<sup>20</sup> Schlegel also pointed out that insufficient funding prevented law schools from actively securing the faculty, facilities, and tools needed to bring social science expertise into the legal learning environment.<sup>21</sup>

Over the years, law schools have attempted different means to weave the expertise of other disciplines into legal education,

---

18. Smith wrote, "It has not been an uncommon experience for the dissatisfied legal scholar, who has made excursions into the realm of economics, or philosophy, or of psychology, to return with a feeling of relief to the more settled and orderly domain of the law." STEVENS, *supra* note 12, at 139-40 (citing COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, REPORT OF THE DEAN 5-6 (1930)).

19. Hutchins recalled: "[W]hat we actually discovered was that psychology had dealt with very few of the points raised by the law of evidence; and that the basic psychological problem of the law of evidence, what will affect juries, and in what way, was one psychology had never touched. . . ." *Id.* at 140 (citing Robert M. Hutchins, *The Autobiography of an Ex-law Student*, 1 U. CHI. L. REV. 511, 513 (1934)). In fact, Clarence Darrow, ten years earlier had used psychiatric evidence to form the major basis of the defense in the Leopold and Loeb case. See ARTHUR WEINBERG & LILA WEINBERG, CLARENCE DARROW: A SENTIMENTAL REBEL 297 (1980). Judge John R. Caverly, who heard the case, recognized the importance of the psychiatric testimony in the development of the social sciences: "[T]he court is willing to recognize that the careful analysis made of the life history of the defendants and of their present mental, emotional and ethical condition has been of extreme interest and is a valuable contribution to criminology." *Id.* at 312. Judge Caverly indicated that ultimately, however, he was more influenced by the age of the defendants (as opposed to the psychological testimony) when sentencing them to life imprisonment rather than death. *Id.*

20. STEVENS, *supra* note 12, at 150 n.75 (citing John Henry Schlegel, *American Legal Realism and Empirical Social Science: From the Yale Experience*, 28 BUFF. L. REV. 459, 519-45 (1980)).

21. *Id.* at 150-51 (citing Schlegel, *supra* note 20, at 545-52).

including: (1) adding social scientists to the law school faculty;<sup>22</sup> (2) supporting collaboration among teachers from different university departments;<sup>23</sup> and (3) involving students from different disciplines in joint seminars offered by more than one department.<sup>24</sup> In addition, some schools experimented with a four-year legal degree, offering a three-year legal curriculum with an additional year of non-legal courses.<sup>25</sup> One variation on this idea that has survived is that of the “law and” dual-degree programs, initiated in 1933 by Yale Law School in collaboration with the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration.<sup>26</sup> Its goal was to provide a “real gain in scientific knowledge and in methods of control of our intricate social organizations.”<sup>27</sup> While the program was discontinued in 1938, it established a model for “law and” degree programs<sup>28</sup> that now include any variety of dual-degree programs, including law and social work, law and business, law and psychology, and law and political science.

As this brief review of the history of interdisciplinary teaching and collaboration in higher learning suggests, while there has been much talk, little has changed in legal education over almost 100 years—including in interdisciplinary efforts.

So why do academicians continue to work at making interdisciplinary education an integral part of curricula?<sup>29</sup> And what can we do to make such efforts successful? It is within this framework that we review the broad-based goals for interdisciplinary education identified by most commentators.

---

22. *Id.* at 158.

23. *Id.* at 166 n.20.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 158-59. The University of Chicago offered one of the most innovative four-year programs from 1937 to 1949. *Id.* at 159. The University of Minnesota Law School offered a four-year program from 1930 to 1958. *Id.* at 159, 167 n.33. Other schools offering four-year programs included Louisiana State, Stanford, the University of Washington, and Washington University. *Id.* at 167 n.33.

26. *Id.* at 159.

27. *Id.* (citing YALE LAW SCHOOL, REPORT OF THE DEAN 5, 16 (1932-33)).

28. *Id.*

29. Historically, most discussion regarding the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration grew out of discussions among legal theoreticians and was opposed by the “practitioners.” Today, more often than not, it appears to be the clinical faculty within university settings who lead the efforts to integrate other disciplines into legal studies.

## II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE GOALS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION

The ultimate purpose of interdisciplinary teaching is to enhance teamwork and collaboration among the professions, thereby strengthening how one practices his or her discipline and how one thinks about what he or she does.<sup>30</sup> As interdisciplinary teaching becomes more widespread, most commentators identify similar broad-based goals:

- Creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation for the relevant disciplines, thus enhancing and encouraging team work;<sup>31</sup>
- Developing knowledge and understanding of another discipline, without necessarily mastering it;<sup>32</sup>
- Enhancing communication among the disciplines in a learning environment that tends to be less adversarial than a work environment, thereby increasing understanding and decreasing interprofessional animosity;<sup>33</sup>
- Achieving effective communication among disciplines by learning different vocabulary;<sup>34</sup>
- Learning other disciplines' rules, beliefs, and ethical principles.<sup>35</sup>

One area, however, that at times is overlooked in discussions of interdisciplinary higher education is the cognitive and social significance of interdisciplinary thinking for students, faculty, and professionals.<sup>36</sup> In addition to all of the reasons we think it is important for professionals-in-training to respect and learn from each other's professions and academic disciplines, we are also committed to teaching toward the development of the level of human cognition that stimulates thought about an issue from all viewpoints, taking into

---

30. See generally Weinstein, *supra* note 3.

31. Janet Weinstein, *And Never the Twain Shall Meet: The Best Interests of Children and the Adversary System*, 52 U. MIAMI L. REV. 79, 159-60 (1997); Moore, *supra* note 3, at 115-16.

32. Harris & Rosenthal, *supra* note 3, at 128; Weinstein, *supra* note 3, at 337-38.

33. Weinstein, *supra* note 31, at 159-60; Moore, *supra* note 3, at 114-16.

34. Weinstein, *supra* note 31, at 159.

35. Moore, *supra* note 3, at 115-16.

36. See HOWARD GARDNER, *THE DISCIPLINED MIND: WHAT ALL STUDENTS UNDERSTAND* (1999).



account varied and, as yet, unthought possibilities.<sup>37</sup> It is this higher level of cognitive processing—what some psychologists define as “wisdom”—that we see as the ultimate outcome of interdisciplinary higher education. For our purposes, wisdom can best be described following the perspective of Joseph W. Meeker. As an outcome of interdisciplinary education, we anticipate what Meeker described as “a state of the human mind characterized by profound understanding and deep insight.”<sup>38</sup> We assume (along with Meeker) that wisdom “cannot be confined to a specialized field, nor is it an academic discipline; it is the consciousness of wholeness and integrity that transcends both.”<sup>39</sup>

Although there is no direct evidence that interdisciplinary education fosters the development of wisdom, there is evidence (from our own students and from the research of others) that students begin to act more wisely when provided with interdisciplinary experiences. As Martinello and Cook described the process in their book, *Interdisciplinary Inquiry in Teaching and Learning*,<sup>40</sup> “The power of interdisciplinary inquiry lies in its ability to encourage diversity of thought, and, therefore, to increase the explorer’s chances of making creative connections and ‘going beyond the information given.’”<sup>41</sup> Harvard professor Howard Gardner further discussed the “power” of interdisciplinary inquiry. “Whatever the power—even the necessity—of the disciplines,” he wrote, “in the end, questions never stop at the boundary of a discipline. Efforts to develop decisive and personal ideas of the true, the beautiful, and the good necessarily take us beyond specific disciplines and invite syntheses.”<sup>42</sup>

---

37. See JEROME BRUNER, *ACTUAL MINDS, POSSIBLE WORLDS* (1986); ERIK H. ERIKSON, *THE LIFE CYCLE COMPLETED* (1982); JEAN PIAGET, *THE MORAL JUDGMENT OF THE CHILD* (Marjorie Gabain trans., 1965); L. S. VYGOTSKY, *MIND IN SOCIETY: DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES* (Michael Cole et al. eds., 1978).

38. Joseph W. Meeker, *Wisdom and Wilderness*, 25 *LANDSCAPE* 15, 15, available at <http://www.cop.com/info/meekatr.html> (on file with the Washington University Journal of Law & Policy).

39. *Id.* Meeker believed that “[w]ilderness is to nature as wisdom is to consciousness.” *Id.* at 16. His description of wisdom is one of the most concise, yet comprehensive available.

40. MARIAN L. MARTINELLO & GILLIAN E. COOK, *INTERDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING* (2d ed. 2000).

41. *Id.* at 9 (citing JEROME BRUNER, *BEYOND THE INFORMATION GIVEN: STUDIES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF KNOWING* (Jeremy M. Anglin ed., 1973)).

42. GARDNER, *supra* note 36, at 147.

Kandel wrote that the task of integrating disciplines in the law school curriculum is, “in part, to enable students to construct legal identities that incorporate their emotional, intellectual, and moral identities. It is also to teach them how to use this holistic perspective in their later practices.”<sup>43</sup> Moore described the “unique insights that come when the two professions work together.”<sup>44</sup> The goal is to create a basis for dealing with problems that cannot be solved without collaboration between professions. Truly effective interdisciplinary collaboration comes from “an interaction which produces a cumulative result—the work of the whole should be greater than the sum of its parts.”<sup>45</sup>

Gardner described insights that can occur when interdisciplinary studies challenge the cognition processes of students and teachers alike. He stressed the need for teachers to keep up with opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and with the changing of disciplinary boundaries, noting that students are cognizant of when their teachers are continually learning, and that they take note “when [the teachers] appear to be excited by new discoveries.”<sup>46</sup>

This type of excitement is reflected in our own experience, both for our students and for us. We share the sentiments expressed by one of our students in a course evaluation: “This intensive exposure to complex issues and great teachers who were enthusiastic about learning from each other (and from us) has left me seeking more!”

Several organizing assumptions guided and, in some cases, emerged from our interdisciplinary efforts. We discuss three of these assumptions below: (1) interdisciplinary teaching facilitates the application of academic knowledge to professional practice; (2) expert and ethical thinking in the helping professions requires interdisciplinary insights; and (3) developing and participating in interdisciplinary coursework require reorganizing the ways we think about and evaluate our own discipline and the disciplines with which we interact. While grounded in the knowledge of our disciplines,

---

43. Randy Frances Kandel, *Whither the Legal Whale: Interdisciplinarity and the Socialization of Professional Identity*, 27 LOY. L.A. L. REV. 9, 21 (1993).

44. Moore, *supra* note 3, at 120.

45. Weinstein, *supra* note 31, at 159.

46. GARDNER, *supra* note 36, at 134.

these assumptions reflect our own interpretations and experiences. In addition, because we have focused our efforts on the interdisciplinary education of child-law students and professionals-in-training working within the child law discipline, we illustrate and justify our assumptions with examples drawn primarily from education and the law.

*A. Interdisciplinary Higher Education Facilitates the Application of Academic Knowledge to Professional Practice*

Most of us who engage in interdisciplinary education probably have as one of our goals the improvement of “knowledge applied to practice.” John Dewey and the Progressive education movement were among the first to posit the importance of this principle in American education.<sup>47</sup> Dewey saw education as a positive instrument of social reform, and recognized the power of education, when applied to experience, to transform social institutions.<sup>48</sup>

Others have described more specifically the benefits of applying knowledge to practice and to the specific role that interdisciplinary education can play in this application. Kim Diana Connolly, for example, subtitled her conclusion to a recent article: “Interdisciplinary Law School Classes Can Enable Future Lawyers to Truly Comprehend the ‘Elephants’ They Will Encounter in Practice and in the Profession.”<sup>49</sup> In her Article, Connolly effectively described the tangible benefits of interdisciplinary education to students, clients, and professionals.<sup>50</sup>

There are good explanations for why interdisciplinary education enhances the application of knowledge to practice. First, practice in many professions (including the legal profession) require the collaboration of interdisciplinary teams. Effective problem solving

---

47. JOHN DEWEY, *EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION* (The Macmillan Co. 1951) (1938).

48. For a further discussion of Dewey’s influence on American education, as well as a discussion of current viewpoints, generally see TONI MARIE MASSARO, *CONSTITUTIONAL LITERACY: A CORE CURRICULUM FOR A MULTICULTURAL NATION* (1993). Massaro wrote, “Public education must respond both to E.D. Hirsch’s sensible claim that we need a common knowledge base in order to communicate and to Stanley Fish’s critical observation that ‘it is difference all the way down.’” *Id.* at 4.

49. See Connolly, *supra* note 3, at 57.

50. *Id.* at 57-60.

requires this collaboration.<sup>51</sup> Effective lawyering requires an understanding of other disciplines' knowledge base,<sup>52</sup> and knowing when to seek assistance from other disciplines.<sup>53</sup> In addition, a mutual understanding between professionals about their disciplines helps to eliminate "confusion, delays, and poor decisionmaking caused by professionals unprepared to interact with one another."<sup>54</sup> The complexity of everyday professional experience connects directly to the next assumption underlying our interdisciplinary efforts.

*B. Expert and Ethical Thinking Required of Individuals Working with Others Requires Interdisciplinary Insights*

"Historically, the role of law schools has been to teach students how to think like a lawyer (i.e., with legal reasoning and analytical thought process)."<sup>55</sup> It has become clear, however, that "thinking like a lawyer" (or, for that matter, "thinking like a psychologist" or "thinking like a social worker") is not sufficient when working in an area like child law.

From the point of view of some professors of child law, the issue has become one of ethical thinking and action. Law professor Diane Geraghty and psychology professor Deborah Holmes, in their collaborative article, *Training Psychologists and Lawyers to Work Together on Children's Issues*,<sup>56</sup> observed:

---

51. Schlossberg, *supra* note 7, at 203 (citing Weinstein, *supra* note 3). "To be an effective problem solver," Schlossberg writes, "a lawyer must be able to step outside the confines of the world of pure law. Such lessons are often learned through collaboration and an honest respect for other approaches to evaluating and understanding a problem." *Id.*

52. Connolly asserts, "Despite a common notion that '[l]awyers for the most part, work with and against other lawyers rather than in teams comprised of people from different specialties,' the truth is that most of today's lawyers live in a more complex world that would benefit from interdisciplinary training." Connolly, *supra* note 3, at 14 (incorporating a quotation from Kandel, *supra* note 43, at 14).

53. *Id.* at 14 n.9 (citing Joan S. Meier, *Notes from the Underground: Integrating Psychological and Legal Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Theory and Practice*, 21 HOFSTRA L. REV. 1295, 1296-97 (1993)).

54. *Id.* at 14 n.10 (citing Suellyn Scarnecchia, *An Interdisciplinary Seminar in Child Abuse and Neglect with a Focus on Child Protection Practice*, 31 U. MICH. J.L. REFORM 33, 34 (1997)).

55. Schlossberg, *supra* note 7, at 215.

56. Deborah L. Holmes & Diane Geraghty, *Training Psychologists and Lawyers to Work Together on Children's Issues* (undated) (unpublished manuscript, on file with the Washington

The problem of psychologists who are inadequately trained in forensic practice is further exacerbated by the fact that frequently neither lawyers nor judges understand or appreciate the psychological principles, evaluative tools and professional limits that govern psychologists' participation in child custody cases.

One consequence of this lack of adequate professional education on the part of psychologists and lawyers has been that in recent years psychologists have come under considerable attack for their role in child custody disputes. Indeed, allegations of professional misconduct in child custody proceedings now represent the second most frequent category of complaint filed with the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethics Committee.<sup>57</sup>

Holmes and Geraghty conclude:

Given the number of ethical complaints involving psychologists' performance in child custody proceedings and the role confusion that often is at the root of such complaints, a consensus is emerging among child advocates and others that professionals who work with children, including psychologists and attorneys, must be better educated about the ethical and legal constraints within which each profession operates.<sup>58</sup>

Interdisciplinary education has the potential to actively engage professionals-in-training with this necessary preparation in ethical collaboration.<sup>59</sup> In our experience, however, attempts at interdisciplinary education are often piecemeal and temporary.

---

University Journal of Law & Policy).

57. *Id.* at 2. As documented by Holmes & Geraghty, "Approximately 10% of complaints filed with the Ethics Committee involve custody disputes in domestic relations cases. The only category in which more complaints are received is in the area of dual relationships between clients and therapists." *Id.* at 2 n.4 (citing the APS Ethics Committee, 1988, 1991, 1993).

58. *Id.* at 13.

59. For an example of interdisciplinary education with this objective, see Schlossberg, *supra* note 7. As Schlossberg observed, "Collaborative problem solving to meet the complexity of clients' demands [and needs] will generate ethical questions for students. . . . Transactional law clinics can aid in this process by providing experiential learning in complex settings that resemble the ethical tensions that arise in the workplace." *Id.* at 205.

Martinello and Cook provided some insight into possible reasons for this: “Schools inevitably reflect the current values of society and, in fact, are intended to conserve dominant values. This may help to explain why the apparently successful ventures in integrated curriculum did not survive and why this approach appears to require reinvention.”<sup>60</sup> Although professionals participating in interdisciplinary teams (as well as their teachers and supervisors) may recognize the need for education in interdisciplinary thinking and action, the strength and longevity of our educational system’s disciplinary approach<sup>61</sup> may hinder the implementation of interdisciplinary curricula.

Attempts to break down discipline-specific barriers sometimes run the risk of alienating, rather than integrating, disciplines. For example, the authors of *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*<sup>62</sup> were critiqued as “oversimplify[ing] the complex issues in child placement disputes”<sup>63</sup> in their attempt to provide guidelines for the courtroom based upon psychological principles. As discussed by Goldstein and his colleagues in the epilogue to their book, Judge Nanette Dembitz of the Family Court of New York state wrote that the “promise of the book to provide guidelines ‘is seductive but impossible. . . . because the amalgams of factors to be appraised in custody contests are too complex.’”<sup>64</sup> Goldstein and his colleagues countered: “Too complex for what?”<sup>65</sup> Conceding that these are indeed complex issues, they emphasized that decisions still must be made. Their conclusion was that “it is beyond the competence of any judge, or for that matter of any discipline, to appraise the amalgam of human factors in any child

---

60. See MARTINELLO & COOK, *supra* note 40. Although Martinello and Cook’s discussion primarily focuses on public education in the U.S., we think that their observations apply as well to higher education. *Id.* at 53.

61. For further discussion about the history and importance of discipline-based education, see GARDNER, *supra* note 36.

62. JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN ET AL., *BEYOND THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD* (2d ed. 1979).

63. See *id.* at 113-15 (discussion of Judge Nanette Dembitz’s review, “Beyond Any Discipline’s Competence.”).

64. *Id.* at 114.

65. *Id.*

placement dispute for purposes of making long-term predictions or dictating special conditions for custody.”<sup>66</sup>

Given the recognition that decisions must be made even in these complex and often unpredictable situations, how can professionals from various disciplines work together (and be educated together) to best make these decisions? The discussion of our next assumption is intended to provide some insight into the direction our own education has taken as we have engaged in interdisciplinary efforts.

*C. Developing and Participating in Interdisciplinary Coursework Requires Reorganizing the Ways We Think About and Evaluate Our Own Discipline and the Disciplines Underlying Other Professions with Whom We Interact*

Psychologist Howard Gardner described both the need for and the challenges of interdisciplinary education, particularly within the context of a discipline-specific institution. Gardner has stated: “The question of interdisciplinary study proves timely. At the beach-heads, most problems do not readily fit into neat disciplinary niches. Teams of interdisciplinary workers are the norm . . . And yet, interdisciplinary work proves challenging, as it requires the wedding of often disparate methods and ways of thinking.”<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Schlossberg discussed the challenges of interdisciplinary education from the perspective of the law school:

Our ability to effectively impart to our students the lessons learned through collaboration is part of the challenge. Our job as teachers is to aid our students in developing their own abilities to engage in problem solving skills critical to success in the highly pressured demands of the work environment.<sup>68</sup>

Effectively imparting to our students how to engage in interdisciplinary ethical practice has proven easier to envision than to implement. Practicing collaborative teamwork (as described, for

---

66. *Id.*

67. GARDNER, *supra* note 36, at 53.

68. Schlossberg, *supra* note 7, at 204-05.

example, by Schlossberg<sup>69</sup> and Weinstein<sup>70</sup>) appears to be the most common approach, and one that often occurs on the job. However, in planning curricula to *teach* principles of interdisciplinary thinking as a framework for lifelong professional development, one of the first challenges is the need to evaluate and reorganize the content of our specific disciplines and to do what we describe as “metadisciplinary work.”<sup>71</sup>

We define “metadisciplinary work” as focusing on the meaning of disciplines, reflecting on their potential to influence our thoughts and actions, and attempting to objectively evaluate their strengths and limitations, particularly within the context of our own professional activities. To do this, we must mentally step outside our own (sometimes unconscious) ways of thinking about things and critically examine our own assumptions and biases. Looking at ourselves (or our disciplines) with a critical eye is not easy reflective work, particularly when all of our education and experience has been directed toward mastery of the knowledge base of our discipline.<sup>72</sup> In interdisciplinary courses, we do this self-reflective, metadisciplinary work in the company of others, often transforming the way we think about our own knowledge and skills, as well as transforming our views about other professions.

This transforming, metadisciplinary work can help professionals-in-training to “break the code” of their own discipline and to encourage the lifelong application of knowledge in a productive, generative way. In our experiences, this process involves examining

---

69. *Id.* at 202-05.

70. Weinstein, *supra* note 3, at 325-28, 352-54; Weinstein, *supra* note 31, at 159-60.

71. See GARDNER, *supra* note 36, at 220.

Having achieved some mastery in at least two disciplines, students can commence genuine interdisciplinary work. . . . Students can also gain from multidisciplinary stances. In these cases, no explicit effort is made to synthesize two disciplines. Rather, the student simply studies a topic as it is seen by representatives of relevant disciplines. . . . Of course, students have the privilege of creating their own interdisciplinary synthesis. . . . Finally, there is metadisciplinary work—actual discussion of the nature of disciplines and how they might be combined.

*Id.* at 220-21.

72. It also must be noted that many students to whom we are teaching “metadisciplinary work” have chosen a profession specifically because they prefer to approach problems from that discipline’s perspective, rejecting an approach taken by another discipline.



the content of a discipline's knowledge base (in addition to learning what that content is) and interpreting the meaning of its structure, principles, and assumptions. Metadisciplinary work also can be described as thinking about and discussing with others what a specific discipline's knowledge base is *not*, by carefully examining its scope and limitations.

We have found that the special context of interdisciplinary education can foster diverse ways of thinking and talking about disciplines, and provide opportunities for thoughtful, collaborative practice. Interdisciplinary education at its best can enable professionals to learn about and evaluate their own discipline-specific knowledge base within a collaborative, interdisciplinary team, while respecting and acknowledging the limits and strengths of their own and the other disciplines involved. For us, truly collaborative interdisciplinary work does not result in professionals making decisions specific to their fields of expertise, but again "the work of the whole should be greater than the sum of its parts."<sup>73</sup> The goal is not for one professional to convince another of the correct answer, but rather for the group members, together, to challenge one another's ideas, perspectives, and beliefs—and together, to reach a conclusion that addresses all of their concerns and examines alternative courses of action.

As Kandel has stated, "It is when the law and the insights revealed by the interdisciplines are palpably incongruent that the interdisciplines are most useful, both in revealing what is not working and in suggesting how it might be made to work."<sup>74</sup> Kandel describes the "Ouch!" and "Ah ha!" tests of relevancy as "the critique that exposes the illusion and . . . the work that inspires the solution."<sup>75</sup>

This kind of transformational work is not easy for students or for faculty. Some information for beginning the process can be found in sources such as *Interdisciplinary Education: A Guide to Resources*.<sup>76</sup> In our experience, however, the most helpful information has come

---

73. Weinstein, *supra* note 31, at 159.

74. Kandel, *supra* note 43, at 23.

75. *Id.*

76. INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO RESOURCES (Joan B. Fiscella & Stacey E. Kimmel eds., 1999).

from our students and from the ongoing, long-term interaction with faculty from diverse disciplines. Our own metadisciplinary work—particularly the process of developing insight into our own professional biases and the miscommunications they sometimes engender—has been difficult, challenging, and neverending.

A challenge, for example, has surfaced in the development and writing of this manuscript. What has interdisciplinary education meant for our students and for us? Even the attempt to define what we call “metadisciplinary work” has been difficult. It is not clear whether this basically psychological concept can be helpful to lawyers and other professionals in child law. We are challenged to identify how the task of integrating our knowledge of our own and each other’s professions and disciplines has transformed the ways we teach, engage in our professions, and think and act within the field of child law.

Although neither of us (nor our students) has become experts in the other’s disciplines (nor is that our goal), we have indeed started to show signs of becoming interdisciplinary thinkers. We have begun to develop and teach from an awareness of the strengths and limits of the various disciplines and what they do and do not offer to the specific area of child law.

We believe that transforming, metadisciplinary work on the part of both students and faculty is a necessity for effective interdisciplinary higher education. Yet metadisciplinary work is very much a “work in progress” and a process that, even as we assume its importance and advocate for it, we are not sure how to describe. Fiscella and Kimmel observed the elusive nature of interdisciplinary study in their search for interdisciplinary resources, affirming our experiences that engaging in interdisciplinary education is “often a longer and more complex process than researching within a discipline.”<sup>77</sup>

Although far from providing explicit instructions on how to do metadisciplinary work, we have become sensitive to recognizing when it happens. As one professional engaging in interdisciplinary education observed: “Earlier I used to think about teachable

---

77. *Id.* at 293.

moments. Now I am more often thinking about learnable moments—when we take notice, when we take issue, when we decide, when we co-construct.”<sup>78</sup>

Although it may be difficult to define the process, we think that we have observed and experienced this transforming aspect of interdisciplinary education. While our students have not used the term “metadisciplinary work,” some of their evaluative comments (reported below) reflect their own personal and professional transformations. In addition, both authors of this Article continue to experience and engage in the process we have defined for now as “metadisciplinary work.”

### III. OUR INTERPRETATION OF PATTERNS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY HIGHER EDUCATION

One of the first challenges faced in planning for interdisciplinary higher education is interpreting (and undoing misinterpretations of) what each of us means by “interdisciplinary” education. In reviewing the process and products of our own interdisciplinary agenda across the years, we have detected three patterns of interdisciplinary education that help to clarify and direct our efforts as we plan for the future. In the following paragraphs, we describe these patterns in terms of our own experiences.

At its most basic, the introduction of an interdisciplinary component in a course can provide students with information about another discipline’s (or a subcomponent of the same discipline’s) perspectives or approaches to a topic or problem. For example, a reading on the dynamics of domestic violence may be included in a law seminar on domestic violence. In a more developed format, our interdisciplinary teaching has included course instructors inviting guest faculty or professionals from other disciplines to share in discussing and modeling the process of collaborative problem solving. This format of inviting faculty and professionals from diverse disciplines into the university classroom can provide students

---

78. BEAU FLY JONES ET AL., REAL-LIFE PROBLEM SOLVING: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING 1 (1997) (quoting Irene DaMota, Principal, Whittier Elementary School).

from one discipline the opportunity to challenge the assumptions, perspectives, and practices of another discipline within a “safe” learning environment. In this model, a faculty member from the school of social work may be invited to lecture on the dynamics of domestic violence and to discuss with the class the implications of these dynamics on the legal response to the problem.

A more complex level of interdisciplinary education occurs when the process of course planning and development itself becomes interdisciplinary, involving a team of faculty from diverse disciplines in the planning and teaching processes, and enrolling students from diverse professions and disciplines in interdisciplinary coursework offered across departments and, at times, both within and outside the university.

Each of these patterns of interdisciplinary coursework offers its own challenges and advantages, and each will be discussed separately below. It should be noted, however, that various forms of interdisciplinary education (not necessarily limited to those we are describing) probably occur along a continuum rather than as discrete levels or types. It also should be noted that each pattern of interdisciplinary education described below has been used in our programs. Although we discuss each pattern separately, it is not our intention to advocate for one over another (although we do have our favorite), but rather to describe how each has or has not worked to facilitate the interdisciplinary education of our students. It is our experience that each pattern is important and can serve educational purposes, particularly within a traditional university committed both to interdisciplinary education and also to maintaining discipline-specific departmental structures.

*A. Pattern 1: Interdisciplinary Education as “One Discipline Studying Another Discipline”*

Based on related literature and on our own experience, this pattern of interdisciplinary education happens regularly, for example, in law schools where any study of the law is about the law of “something.”<sup>79</sup> This pattern relies on faculty members developing a sufficient

---

79. See, e.g., Connolly, *supra* note 3, at 17.

knowledge base to provide lectures about issues outside of their discipline, but relevant to the subject being taught. We have found this format of interdisciplinary education to be the easiest to integrate into an existing program of study. There are, however, challenges as well as advantages to this form of what we call “in-house” interdisciplinary education. In our experience, both challenges and advantages have tended to fall into three categories: (1) time and structure, (2) dissemination of knowledge, and (3) student concerns.

### 1. Time and Structure

We have found that information about other disciplines and the worth of interdisciplinary education can be integrated in a straightforward way into other courses, particularly when faculty, deans, and higher administration are committed to an interdisciplinary agenda. For example, a department’s commitment to reviewing course syllabi for evidence of interdisciplinary focus can be implemented quickly (in terms of academic timeframes) and have immediate results. Faculty development seminars can support this commitment by focusing on best practice in incorporating interdisciplinary knowledge. We have found two challenges, however, that work against this pattern. First, there is rarely enough time within the established course requirements to describe adequately another discipline’s knowledge base or to provide interdisciplinary experience along with discussion. Second, although typically not requiring extensive preparation or teaching time, the background and expertise of discipline-specific faculty may not be sufficient to accurately convey the strengths and concerns of another discipline and/or the professionals educated within that discipline.

### 2. Knowledge Dissemination

The integration of another discipline’s information into existing coursework is typically viewed by both faculty and students as a low-stress and efficient method of learning “outside the box.” The risk, however, of bias and/or misinterpretation in describing another profession or discipline can be high. The most significant areas of overlap typically can be presented in a straightforward manner, but there can be a tendency to oversimplify the other discipline’s role. It

is not unusual for aspects and responsibilities involved in the other discipline's role to be unknown or interpreted as unimportant, and therefore omitted within the "interdisciplinary" focus integrated into an existing course. We also have found that, when this format is the extent of interdisciplinary involvement, there is a risk of overconfidence on the part of both faculty and students that they have, and can engage in, meaningful and informative interdisciplinary education and practice.

### 3. Student Involvement

In our experience, almost every faculty member and every course can include some element of interdisciplinary education, primarily by highlighting and discussing other disciplines and the roles professionals educated within these disciplines play in interdisciplinary partnerships. This course-integration format can alert students to the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge and practice. Typically, however, there is little or no opportunity for students to interact with professionals or other students educated in the other disciplines. The outcome, therefore, may be a fairly simplistic and unrealistic view of the challenges of interdisciplinary partnerships.

#### *B. Pattern 2: Interdisciplinary Education as "Representatives (Professionals and Faculty) from Another Discipline Sharing Their Expertise, Education, and Knowledge Base"*

We have found that inviting professionals and faculty from other disciplines into our classrooms is an excellent way to educate our students and ourselves about the integration and shared responsibilities of our various areas of expertise. Certain features of this approach, however, can make or break its effectiveness. For example, in our experience, it is necessary for the course instructor to remain in the classroom while the guest expert is presenting. In fact, it is important that the course instructor and guest expert interact as part of the interdisciplinary education of the students. Much of the strength of this form of interdisciplinary education occurs through the modeling of cross-disciplinary behavior and discussion between the course instructor and the guest expert. In many ways, this shared

experience provides a context for faculty development that enriches not only the students' education, but also the professionals engaged in it.

There are, of course, difficulties associated with implementing this more complex form of interdisciplinary education. In our experience, some of these challenges include: (1) occasional difficulty experienced by the guest expert in conveying information in a way that reduces student frustration with the complexity of issues, particularly when students are required to examine them outside the framework of their chosen profession; (2) occasionally high levels of discomfort among guest faculty or professionals when challenged by students or faculty unfamiliar with (and perhaps biased against, or disrespectful of) their area of expertise or experience;<sup>80</sup> (3) students' frequent perception of guest lecturers' content as less relevant, or unimportant, for purposes of study or an exam; (4) the time-consuming quality of coordination between the guest expert and the course instructor, which is sometimes unsatisfactory to the students as well as faculty and, therefore, is frustrating to all involved; (5) the possibility that shared discussion between the guest expert and course instructor may reach a level of knowledge or expertise that excludes the students; and (6) the fact that the guest expert's presentation may be a "one-shot deal" with little integration or follow-up throughout the rest of the students' educational experience.

*C. Pattern 3: Interdisciplinary Education as "Interdisciplinary Teams of Faculty from Diverse Disciplines Planning and Teaching a Course Enrolled in by Students from Diverse Disciplines and Professions"*

This is the model used in Loyola University Chicago's annual Children's Summer Institute and, we must admit, is our favorite pattern of interdisciplinary education. It allows for collaboration by faculty from different schools in the planning, development, and teaching of a course that integrates the ethics, substantive knowledge

---

80. Law students often hold an hierarchical attitude toward other social science disciplines.

base, and intellectual challenges of all the disciplines while teaching students from similarly diverse backgrounds. There are several reasons why this is our favored pattern of teaching. First and foremost, we have enjoyed and been enriched by our interaction with faculty colleagues and professionals from diverse disciplines. Second, because of its innovative format and timely topic, the Summer Institute draws a diverse and talented group of students, including law students (primarily from child law but also from other legal specialties) and graduate students from psychology, social work, education, child development, family studies, and criminal justice. Third, we have developed an innovative format for offering this form of interdisciplinary education, which seems to most effectively (1) allow us to model, in the classroom, the process of collaborative problem solving, and (2) allow students from diverse backgrounds, experience, and training to challenge assumptions, perspectives, and practices of another's discipline within a "safe" learning environment.

The catalyst for the development of Loyola's Children's Summer Institute was a commitment by the university administration to fund innovative and interdisciplinary academic efforts across the university. This opportunity not only allowed a group of interested faculty to come together, but also eliminated some of the logistical hurdles typically encountered when attempting to implement this complex form of interdisciplinary education within the regular course format offered through our respective departments.

The Children's Summer Institute takes place over the course of one five-day week<sup>81</sup> in July, meeting from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM, and enrolls approximately fifty students, who register for either graduate course credit or law school credit (depending on their program of studies). Because of the short-term of the class, students receive the syllabus and reading materials several weeks in advance of the course. The first day of the Institute integrates the required course

---

81. The intensity of the Children's Summer Institute enhances the interdisciplinary collaborative experience of students and faculty. Students are not rushing into class or scrambling to get to their next class or home after a three-hour session. Spending five full days together facilitates discussion and interaction among students, and thus provides students and faculty with a greater opportunity to share ideas, responses, and new ways of approaching issues.



activities with a one-day professional development/continuing education seminar, which typically enrolls 75-100 professionals from various disciplines and agencies.

Planning for the next Summer Institute begins immediately after the conclusion of the previous Institute, integrating students' evaluations and faculty members' assessments into the planning process. Each Summer Institute is based on the general topic of "In the Best Interests of the Child," and highlights a timely issue of local and national importance.<sup>82</sup> Speakers, panels of professionals, faculty, and students are recruited both locally and nationally.<sup>83</sup>

Our goals for the Children's Summer Institute are fivefold:

1. Give students the opportunity to explore a core issue affecting children through several sets of disciplinary lenses.
2. Provide students with a baseline of relevant knowledge (e.g., latest research findings, new legal developments).
3. Model for students the importance of seeking multidisciplinary solutions to children's problems.
4. Offer students concrete training in effective work with other professionals in pursuit of common child-centered objectives.
5. Alert students to ethical responsibilities and liabilities.

Even given our enthusiasm for the interdisciplinary education provided through the Summer Institute, it is important to discuss the challenges presented by this level of complexity. In addition, it is important to note that (probably due to our enthusiasm and personal enrichment) the development and implementation of this program has depended to a large extent on the commitment and volunteer

---

82. "The Adoption and Safe Families Act Five Years Later: Good, Bad, or Irrelevant?" was the topic for the Children's Summer Institute 2003. Prior years' topics include: "Deciding a Child's Best Interest: The Legal, Ethical and Psychosocial Issues in Severing Family Ties"; "Child-Centered Divorce: An Oxymoron?"; and "A Rush to Judgment? The Legal, Ethical and Psychosocial Issues in Deciding Adoption and Other Permanent Placements."

83. The syllabus for the most recent Summer Institute is available on request from the authors, as is additional information about both the planning and implementation of the Summer Institute.

expertise of the team of faculty involved.

Challenges have occurred primarily in three areas: (1) focus, (2) logistics, and (3) student assessment.

### 1. Focus

As we attempt to focus our interdisciplinary Summer Institute, it is sometimes difficult to recognize and support the wide range of experience and knowledge among diverse faculty and students studying different professions and disciplines. As we describe the challenge, it is sometimes difficult to “exploit” (in the best senses of that word) the diverse talents of students and faculty, creatively using varied expertise to enhance the interdisciplinary classroom. One approach to this challenge has been to include “everything from everyone” in our course requirements, activities, and presentations. This approach, of course, presents its own challenge and we continue to find it difficult to focus (and limit) the information we present, leading to an over-abundance (for both faculty and students) of assigned reading materials and required information.

### 2. Logistics

In some ways, the most pervasive (and potentially defeating) challenge has been attempting to overcome a range of logistic hurdles created by the involvement of several graduate programs. These include geography (e.g., our university is dispersed across various campuses), different academic calendars and conflicting class schedules, student availability to interact and work on projects outside the classroom, and different course credit requirements, tuition rates, and faculty compensation procedures. There is often confusion regarding the allocation of tuition payments to the participating schools. In addition, it is the rare university structure that supports co-teaching efforts—often there is resistance to paying two faculty members to jointly teach.

### 3. Student Assessment

The assessment of individual student progress offers specific challenges. First, it is difficult to develop common outcome goals and

evaluation standards given the different expectations for the amount of reading, in- and out-of-class preparation, readiness levels, and required performance criteria. Second, and most importantly for our students and their home programs, expectations related to course grades differ. Although students completing degrees through our university's graduate school must earn letter grades of A's and B's in coursework to maintain required academic standing, the law school employs a grading curve stipulating that each course assign grades from A to F, with the bulk of grades being B's and C+'s.

#### IV. LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT INTERDISCIPLINARY HIGHER EDUCATION TO THIS POINT

The length of the subtitle of this concluding section reflects the complexity involved in implementing interdisciplinary education. We say "learned to this point" because we have found planning and revising an interdisciplinary agenda in higher education to be an ongoing learning process, in theory and in practice, for our students and for us. In this section, we begin by providing an informal qualitative evaluation of our interdisciplinary efforts to date based on students' course evaluations. Students' comments are grouped by themes, which we have used as the basis for program changes. We then share some of the lessons we have learned to this point. Although this section reflects our interpretations of our interdisciplinary experiences, we hope that it will be useful to others engaged in efforts to develop, implement, evaluate, and revise interdisciplinary higher education programs.

##### *A. An Informal Evaluation of Our Interdisciplinary Efforts*

Participating students have evaluated each interdisciplinary course and Summer Institute that we have taught. These evaluations, along with our self-evaluations, have been used to revise our interdisciplinary efforts. The informal report provided here (loosely based on the qualitative methods described by Merriam<sup>84</sup>) is based on

---

84. See SHARAN B. MERRIAM, *QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND CASE STUDY APPLICATIONS IN EDUCATION* (1998).

a subset of the comments of seventy students received over the four years the program has been offered. We evaluate here responses to the question: “*Please add any comments you wish to make, including whether you would or would not recommend the Summer Institute to other students/professionals. Why or Why Not?*”

Participating Students: Seventy students provided information related to this question. Their responses reflected the interdisciplinary diversity of students involved in the Summer Institute; that is, approximately 50% of the respondents were law students (seeking J.D., M.J.<sup>85</sup>, or L.L.M. degrees), while the other 50% were divided among dual-degree students (M.S.W./M.J.) and graduate students in a single discipline (M.S.W., M.S. in Education, M.S. in Child Development, or Ph.D. in Psychology).

Responses: Of the seventy responses, sixty-nine participants explicitly stated that they would recommend the Summer Institute to other students. The one other student provided only the comment: “Too much in too short a time.” This comment was interpreted as a “would not recommend” evaluation.

Themes: Seven themes emerged from the sixty-nine answers to the question, “*Why would you recommend the Summer Institute?*” We gave these themes the descriptive labels listed below. Each comment was assigned to the theme interpreted as providing the best fit; representative comments are provided for each theme, below. In addition, the number of comments related to each theme is provided. The themes are presented in the order of most to least comments.

Theme 1—Integrative, Reflective, Transforming Experience (Defined by us as “Metadisciplinary Work”)—21 Comments.

Representative comments included:

- “This class let me reflect on my own knowledge as well as add to that knowledge.”

---

85. Loyola University Chicago School of Law offers a unique two-year masters degree in ChildLaw. The program is geared towards individuals in professions working with children, who are seeking in-depth understanding of how the law and the legal system impacts children and their families. The School of Law also offers a graduate L.L.M. degree in ChildLaw for attorneys.

- “Professionals working with children and families should be required to take interdisciplinary courses such as this one. Becoming aware of others’ perspectives, worldviews, and professional influences is critical for teamwork with both other professionals and families.”
- “It gave an excellent overview of the legal system, and the blending of disciplines was particularly insightful.”
- “I believe that this course should be a requirement in every discipline for anyone who is planning on working in Child Welfare. To see the differences of opinion due to the diverse backgrounds and training is the beginning to understanding how much we need to respect and work together, rather than against one another.”

Theme 2—Knowledge Applied to Practice—16 Comments.

Representative comments included:

- “This experience is not only theoretically related but also an opportunity to apply rules in practice-based assignments.”
- “This course should be required for any profession that works with children in some capacity. It helps them see the big picture of how different agencies and individuals impact children for a variety of reasons.”
- “This course is important for anyone who has an interest or who works with children and families. I feel it is very important for the various disciplines to convene together to discuss issues related to children and families. We can come to understand this framework for each other’s professions, the skills and limitations each one brings.”

Theme 3—Stimulating, Interest-Generating—13 Comments.

Representative comments included:

- “The broadening of mind and vision unfolding has been phenomenal. This was a rewarding experience on multiple levels.”

- “Learned a lot from this course. It has left me seeking more!”
- “Very insightful and a valuable learning experience.”
- “My respect and knowledge for the field was significantly increased by the issues discussed during this course.”

#### Theme 4—Intensity—8 Comments.

Comments relating to the Summer Institute’s “intensity” were both positive and negative, even though the students stated that they would recommend the course. Representative comments are identified as “positive” or “negative”:

- “Very interesting but too rushed.” (negative).
- “The week was very long; long days did not leave much room to complete readings and I didn’t feel like I could put my best work towards assignments.” (negative).
- “Provides a variety of ideas and options in a short period of time. Doesn’t give you a chance to forget it before class is over.” (positive).
- “Students should know that this course requires total immersion. A good thing (almost spiritual), although you can’t plan anything else during the week, if possible, not even family/parenting responsibilities.” (positive).

#### Theme 5—Teachers and Professionals as Models—5 Comments. A representative comment was:

- “Intensive exposure to important issues and great teachers and experts interacting from their own perspectives about the issue and how they approach it.”

#### Theme 6—Suggestions Related to Course Logistics—4 Comments.

Representative comments were:

- “It would be helpful for students in the class to actually look at a real case file (the one-foot thick variety) to get an

idea of the complexity and to gain a greater understanding of the process.”

- “Too much reading. Course description might mention something about the number of pages involved and the papers.”

Theme 7—Diverse Group of Students—2 Comments.

Although comments from other parts of the course evaluations reflected this theme, only two comments for this particular question related to it. A representative comment was:

- “It was a wonderful experience, especially meeting the other students from other professions and academic areas.”

Summary: What we have reported here is an informal qualitative approach to course evaluation. Various versions of this approach have worked well as we informally use students’ comments in a formative way to revise our interdisciplinary offerings. This kind of “theme generating” analysis of students’ comments has enabled us to include our students’ voices in the way we think about the purposes, process, and outcomes of interdisciplinary education. In addition, these themes, and the comments that generated them, have played an integral role in the lessons learned through our interdisciplinary experiences.

### *B. Some Lessons Learned*

The following descriptions provide brief and (we hope) thought-provoking insights and questions. These “lessons learned” are intended to stimulate discussion.

1. Carefully consider what information and which aspects of each discipline’s knowledge base will be included in the interdisciplinary course requirements

By definition, the generation of knowledge is an integral component of each academic discipline. Enhanced communication technology and the rapid pace of discovery have made keeping up

with the scholarship within one's own area difficult.<sup>86</sup> This challenge is magnified when students are asked to absorb the expanding knowledge base of more than one discipline. The fact that each discipline has its own idiosyncratic jargon, writing conventions, and publication formats and venues further complicates the task. In addition, in an applied program (such as one focused on children in the legal system), the application of new knowledge within the practice changes rapidly, and often without clear documentation—or at least without documentation that is academically rigorous and readily available to practitioners, scholars, and students, particularly those outside of a particular academic field.<sup>87</sup>

Students' early evaluations of our interdisciplinary courses consistently reflected a sense of being overwhelmed by the quantity of required information and the challenge of "breaking the code" of other disciplines. Through the years, we have struggled to make the required readings and assignments comprehensive yet manageable. In our lectures, we try to convey information in a way that reduces students' frustration with the complexity of the issues when they are forced to examine the issues outside the framework of their chosen discipline. This process requires participating faculty to be open to compromise and to identify those components of their own discipline's literature that will be most accessible to, and thought provoking for, students in other professions. It is also important that faculty operate under the assumption that the basic analytic skills necessary to the practice of a specific profession will be developed in other courses.

---

86. On the other hand, the advent of the Internet has made access to interdisciplinary materials, and the undertaking of interdisciplinary research, far easier than it had been in the past.

87. Balanced with this need not to overwhelm students is the importance of assuring that students do not come to believe that the interdisciplinary training has prepared them to perform the work of other professionals. This may be most applicable to law students believing that "some" interdisciplinary knowledge prepares them "to do" social work, counseling, and teaching.



2. Develop formats for interdisciplinary programs that encourage active participation and generate a sense of community among students from diverse programs and backgrounds

Some patterns of interdisciplinary education, such as the use of guest experts, may be easier to plan and implement than a fully integrated interdisciplinary course would be. Such an approach, however, lacks the sense of community and the intensive “togetherness” that students from diverse disciplines need in order to work together and to integrate their knowledge and areas of expertise into shared experiences. We use breakout group assignments, mock exercises, and field trips to enhance and build upon the wide range of expertise, knowledge, and life experience available in a classroom comprised of students studying different disciplines and preparing for different professions. Student evaluations consistently reflect an appreciation for the benefits of a sustained focus on interdisciplinary learning throughout a course.

3. Find faculty members who are committed to interdisciplinary education for themselves as well as their students and who are willing and able to spend the necessary time planning and implementing the interdisciplinary program

Interdisciplinary collaboration—while rewarding—is extremely time-consuming. It is usually far simpler to develop a syllabus and prepare a reading packet on one’s own than to coordinate meeting times, negotiate reading assignments, and achieve agreement on the curriculum, teaching styles, formats, and grading criteria. In addition, as noted above, universities usually are not structured to facilitate co-teaching efforts. Add to these challenges the distinct skills involved in co-teaching—our best classroom discussions and learning opportunities for students arise when we are comfortable and confident enough to challenge one another’s statements and perspectives in front of the students.

When interdisciplinary collaboration works, however, the benefits to faculty members far outweigh the struggles. These benefits include enhanced learning on the part of the faculty, increased intellectual

stimulation and challenges, and unique opportunities for collaborative research and writing.

4. Always integrate the interdisciplinary perspective throughout the entire course, particularly if the actual interdisciplinary curriculum is limited to one offering

Although this was the only interdisciplinary educational opportunity for most of the students enrolled in our courses, the students stated that it was important for them to have this broad perspective as they returned to their own program of studies.

5. Interdisciplinary education should be both serious and fun!

Through the years of our experience, we have come to realize that, although the commitment to interdisciplinary education must be a serious one, the implementation of interdisciplinary education must be enjoyable and applicable to one's own career goals and expectations. Making students uncomfortable with their own way of looking at issues and ideas may be a first step towards stimulating developmental change. If, however, students are going to leave the interdisciplinary learning experience with a commitment to diversity and respect for others with whom they will be interacting, then the interdisciplinary education must be carefully structured to move quickly from a stimulating disequilibrium to a state of stability and flexibility that enables both the maintenance of one's own perspective and a respect for others' perspectives and abilities. Our planning process regularly includes both serious and enjoyable ways to further the interdisciplinary agenda. This is, perhaps, the most important lesson learned to this point in our interdisciplinary experience.