



To: Graduate Studies Committee

From: Tammy D. Barry 
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

Date: September 28, 2023

RE: Updated Individual Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program (IIDP) *Faculty/Student Handbook* for the 2023-2024 Academic Year incorporating all the suggestions by the GSC's committee following the 9/12/2023 meeting

Major Policy Changes with Updates (*Points 5, 6, and 7 have been added following the advice of GSC*)

- 1. Insights from *two or more disciplines* would suffice for the program in lieu of the prior high ask of *three or more disciplines* which has lost relevance over time as fields have become more encompassing on their own.**

Implications and Rationale: This change redefines the scope of IIDP by making it open for students who wish to explore phenomena that transcend the boundaries of a single discipline by recombining insights from *two or more disciplines* in lieu of the previously high ask of involving *three or more disciplines*. This update acknowledges broader change in the education sector in that the traditional disciplines are no longer as siloed as they used to be four decades ago (e.g., 1983 when WSU's IIDP kicked off) and have evolved themselves to become broader often intersecting with or borrowing knowledge from sister disciplines. This change allows the flexibility to add more than two disciplines if needed but does not require the student to stretch into a third discipline for "program purposes." Moreover, this change to a minimum of two instead of three simplifies the Program of Study for the students in multiple ways (e.g., reducing suggested or required courses from the third discipline which they may think as quite distant to their core research interest, adding a committee member from the third discipline).

This update is consistent with similar policies and procedures at other reputable universities, for example, MIT, University of Alabama, and University of Washington.

- 2. In view of the above proposed change, an IIDP student's program committee now can consist of four eligible faculty members representing two or more distinct disciplines rather than the prior requirement of having five members representing three or more disciplines.**

Implications and Rationale: Following the change proposed in point #1 above, this update will require a commitment from four eligible faculty members representing two or more distinct disciplines to serve on the student's doctoral committee rather than the prior requirement of five faculty members representing three disciplines. Doctoral committee members' eligibility requirements remain the same except for the change in number of members. The handbook details the requirements of committee composition.

3. Program structure updates include:

Formation of four committees rather than prior structure's single point(s) of decision:

- The ***IIDP Admissions Committee*** consists of Associate Vice Provosts (AVP) for the Graduate School, including AVP for Interdisciplinary Initiatives, AVP for Graduate Academic Programs, and AVP for Graduate Enrollment Management. This committee meets in person or online for admissions related decision-making during spring, and summer if needed. The committee makes recommendations to the Chair of the program (i.e., Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education), who is the final arbiter in such cases.
- The ***IIDP Curriculum Committee*** consists of the same three AVPs for the Graduate School. This committee meets in person or online for curriculum related decisions when needed. The committee makes recommendations to the Chair of the program (i.e., Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education), who is the final arbiter in such cases.
- The ***IIDP Examination Committee*** consists of the same three AVPs for the Graduate School. This committee meets in person or online for students' examination related decisions when needed. The committee makes recommendations to the Chair of the program (i.e., Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education), who is the final arbiter in such cases.
- The ***IIDP Quality Assurance Committee*** consists of the same three AVPs for the Graduate School. This committee is responsible for maintaining the world class standard of IIDP. This committee regularly meets in person or online to complete scheduled assessments of the quality of the program and the students' performance. The committee makes recommendations to the Chair of the program (i.e., Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education), who is the final arbiter in such cases.

4. A strategically renewed program mission has been written as follows:

IIDP at Washington State University is designed for those meritorious and visionary graduate students who wish to address exceptional research questions that transcend boundaries of traditional disciplines by leveraging and recombining insights from two or more disciplines for the benefit of humanity. We aspire to develop exceptional researchers, engaging teachers, and leaders who serve the whole education sector through their innovative thinking and problem-solving skills for making a positive global impact.

5. The application process has been updated to streamline as follows:

Applications are submitted through the Graduate School Website. Materials needed include:

1. Three recommendation letters highlighting the applicant's academic ability, experience, and potential for independent Ph.D. research.
2. Transcripts that reflect a minimum 3.0 GPA in graduate and undergraduate coursework.
3. A statement of purpose of no more than three pages that covers:
 - a. Identification and justification for the two (or more) essential academic disciplines of interest from which the primary coursework will be drawn. (Note that if only two

committee members are identified at the time of application, at least two additional members will need to be identified to complete the committee).

- b. The proposed interdisciplinary research topic that clearly demonstrates the synergy between the academic disciplines and how they are needed to answer the general research question(s).
4. Commitment from at least two faculty members (at least one from each academic discipline of interest) to serve on the doctoral advisory committee. This commitment will also confirm that the student's research question would be best addressed outside of a single discipline.
- 6. An update regarding the preliminary exam was made to make the timeline more flexible.**

The preliminary examination can be taken anytime after passing the qualifying exam, provided the student has an approved program of study with no more than six graded credits remaining.
{Other points are the same as before}

- 7. The description of the dissertation format has been updated to allow for more options consistent with the chosen disciplines.**

The nature and structure of the dissertation should follow what is typical in the student's research disciplines. A common format for the dissertation is the manuscript format, which includes several chapters describing a project involving original work. Another common format is to include a collection of empirical articles or essays with an introduction and conclusion. In this latter case, the articles must be based on research undertaken at WSU, and the graduate student must be each article's major contributor and primary author. The IIDP will also consider, even welcome, diverse kinds of creative dissertations, which the Graduate School already accepts from various disciplines. The nature and the structure of the dissertation should be approved by the student's doctoral advisory committee in advance of the preliminary exam. The Chair will communicate the planned format with the IIDP program committee for final approval.

Minor Policy Changes with Updates (*Points 10, 11, and 12 have been added following the advice of GSC*)

- 8. Updates were made to the titles of the graduate school faculty and staff as per the current structure (e.g., from dean to vice provost, and associate deans to associate vice provosts, among others).**

Updated titles with contemporary responsibilities: The Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education serves as the department chair of the Individual Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program. The Associate Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Initiatives serves as the program director of the Individual Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program. The academic coordinator serves as the program manager advising the director and the students.

9. The Student Learning Outcomes have been updated as follows:

- To assist high-quality inspired students in designing the framework for a unique, individualized doctoral degree program which is tailored to their interests via integrating the knowledge of two or more disciplines in their research, IIDP aims to provide following experiences that help students to:
 - Develop knowledge and understanding of appropriate concepts, methods, and materials in two or more disciplines which appropriately constitute the framework of their studies.
 - Attain fundamental experience to apply knowledge in two or more unique disciplines while providing opportunities for creative and integrative thinking.

- To prepare such students to be effective researchers, engaging teachers, and innovative thinkers, under the mentorship of leading teachers and researchers in various fields, for productive careers that will produce interdisciplinary scholarship contributing to a positive and more global outcome, the program aims to provide a variety of experiences that help students to:
 - Attain fundamental mentorship from committee members from at least two disciplines in support of interdisciplinary research through integrative thinking.
 - Become independent researchers in an interdisciplinary area of study by developing substantial expertise in the areas which will allow them to make an original contribution.

10. A list of faculty who may serve on their committee will be made available to students.

A link to the “Faculty of the Graduate School” (per the new 2023-24 GS Policies and Procedures) will be provided in the handbook and appropriate web pages when the directory is finalized. This link would help the students in identifying faculty in their disciplines of interest.

11. Changes were made to allow students more flexibility, particularly those who may be completing the program part-time, as full-time attendance is not required.

Timeline and benchmarks are now specified relative to other milestones (e.g., the preliminary exam can be anytime after passing the qualifying exam, provided the student has an approved program of study with no more than six graded credits remaining, the latter of which is a Graduate School policy). This change, in lieu of putting benchmarks at semesters (e.g., the preliminary exam needs to be within two semesters of the qualifying exam), makes the deadlines more flexible and are relative to the student’s own pacing through milestones and courses.

12. A transfer course credit policy was developed, as it was not covered in the previous handbook.

The updated handbook makes it explicit that the IIDP will consider transferable credits that are applicable to the discipline areas chosen for the degree. Any credits transferred will count toward the 72 required credits. Given that the IIDP program committee would necessarily have expertise in any given student’s research disciplines, the committee member(s) with that expertise would be asked to review the syllabus from the course to be transferred and approve it or not.