

# INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM APPLICATION PROCEDURE

November 2003

This document outlines the application procedure to follow for the Interdisciplinary (InterD) Program.

Students wishing to apply for an individual interdisciplinary program should contact the chair of the Interdisciplinary Committee, any of the Interdisciplinary Committee members, and/or the head of the theme area with which they wish to be associated. A list of contacts is available at the end of this document.

Students should also work closely with their proposed supervisor in the preparation of the application. The supervisor needs to be actively involved in assisting the student with the application (i.e., the student is not responsible for doing all the work surrounding an individual interdisciplinary program proposal).

## WHAT IS INTERDISCIPLINARITY?

Many definitions of interdisciplinarity exist, all of which offer insights into what is meant by the term, and students and faculty working in an interdisciplinary fashion will each develop their own views as to what constitutes interdisciplinarity. However, to focus attention and prompt thinking, the following perspective from Fairbairn and Fulton (B. Fairbairn and M. Fulton, *Interdisciplinarity and the Transformation of the University* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 2000), available at [http://www.coop-studies.usask.ca/publications/electronic\\_format](http://www.coop-studies.usask.ca/publications/electronic_format)) is offered: “Our hypothesis is that interdisciplinarity can be defined as a problem-based approach — or what we might also call an object-based approach — in which knowledge and methods are brought to bear as needed to solve a complex problem or to address an object of study. The problem or the object is defined externally to the disciplines involved; it is not a simple intellectual construct or abstraction. Such an approach is distinct from disciplinary research, in which problems are conceived within the knowledge and methods of the discipline” (p. 4). This view stresses the need for identifying problems, for the crossing of boundaries, and for embracing different perspectives and methodologies.

## ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUND

The Individual InterD Program is designed to allow students to undertake research that cannot be carried out through the regular graduate programs at the University of Saskatchewan. Since most regular graduate programs are closely associated with academic departments or colleges, students enrolled in the InterD program find themselves without the organizational and administrative support that is provided to students in regular programs. As a consequence, InterD proposals must outline at least two things: (1) the nature of the research that is being proposed, and the course requirements and the Student Advisory Committee composition necessary to undertake this research; and (2) the administrative and financial support that is being made available by the university. Both of these elements must be outlined before the student begins the

program. Defining the nature of the program is critical because of the need to demonstrate that the University of Saskatchewan has the expertise to offer a graduate program in the proposed area. Securing administrative and financial support ahead of time is critical, since students must be assured that this support will be available for the duration of their program.

Administratively, the College of Graduate Studies and Research (CGSR) Interdisciplinary Committee serves as the Graduate Affairs Committee for the Interdisciplinary Program, while the Interdisciplinary Committee Chair acts as Graduate Chair for students in independent interdisciplinary programs.

## **SCHOLARSHIPS**

### **University Graduate Scholarships**

The College of Graduate Studies and Research offers University Graduate Scholarships (UGSs) through both a devolved and a nondevolved system. Graduate programs belonging to the nondevolved system participate in a university-wide competition. The Interdisciplinary Program currently belongs to the nondevolved system.

Value: Ph.D. — \$18,000 (tenable up to thirty-six months); Master's with thesis — \$15,000 (tenable up to twenty-four months).

Eligibility: All UGS holders must be full-time, fully-qualified students in a graduate degree program or prospective students who have been admitted to a graduate degree program. Students participating in the university-wide competition (nondevolved) must have at least an 80 percent GPA in the last two years of completed study.

Students must be nominated by the program in which they are in — thus, InterD students must be nominated by the Interdisciplinary Committee. To be eligible for consideration for the CGSR scholarships, students who are not already enrolled in the InterD program must submit their applications to the InterD Committee by the following deadlines:

***Initial Application to Interdisciplinary Studies — December 15 (or first working day)***

***Final Application to Interdisciplinary Studies — January 15 (or first working day)***

These dates are chosen to ensure that the Interdisciplinary Committee is able to admit students to the InterD program and to submit student names to the CGSR by the February 25 deadline.

### **NSERC/SSHRC**

***NSERC deadline — October 15***

***SSHRC deadline — December 1***

Information on Master's and Ph.D. scholarships offered by NSERC/SSHRC can be found at the following websites: SSHRC: [www.sshrc.ca](http://www.sshrc.ca); NSERC: [www.nserc.ca](http://www.nserc.ca).

### **GTAs/GTFs**

Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) are available to fully-qualified, full-time students. GTA holders provide service in the form of demonstrating, instructing, marking, etc. GTA offers

are made by departments and colleges in which graduate programs are offered. New and continuing students should inform the chair of the InterD Committee in writing as early as possible of their interest in being considered for a GTA, providing full information and documentation on their ability to carry out the required service.

Graduate Teaching Fellowships (GTF) are available to fully-qualified, full-time students who meet the academic requirements of the award. GTF holders provide service in the form of demonstrating, leading tutorials, teaching, marking, etc. up to twelve hours per week for the September to April period. GTF awards are allocated by departments and colleges in which graduate programs are offered. New and continuing students should inform the chair of the InterD Committee in writing as early as possible of their interest in being considered for a GTF, providing full information and documentation on their ability to carry out the required service.

For more information on scholarships, please see the following document:

<http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/awardscgsr.html>

## APPLICATION DEADLINES

Students wishing to do an Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Program at the University of Saskatchewan may apply at any time during the year. However, students must submit their applications at least three to four months prior to the start of the academic term in which they wish to begin. The following deadlines are in effect.

- Students wishing to start their program in September must submit their final application by May 1.
- Students wishing to start their program in January must submit their final application by September 30.
- Students wishing to start their program in May must submit their final application by December 31.

## ELEMENTS OF AN APPLICATION

The attached checklist (<http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/interd/prospective/checklist.html>) shows the elements that need to be included in each application. The sections below provide background and detail on selected elements of this checklist.

Before preparing an application, students must ensure that they are eligible to enter the InterD Program. The **minimum requirements** for the InterD program are that students have an 80 percent average in the last sixty credit units of academic work and that they have the appropriate degree for the program they wish to enter (e.g., they have a Bachelor's degree from a recognized university if they wish to enter a Master's program and a Master's degree from a recognized university if they wish to enter a Ph.D. program). Additional information can be found in GSR 411 — Guidelines for Individual Interdisciplinary Programs.

## 1. Cover Page

- Applicant Name; Proposal Title; Date; Theme Area (only applicable if program is in a Theme area).

## 2. Table of Contents

## 3. Research Statement

- *Problem statement.* What is the problem that you wish to study? What is the context for this problem? How does this problem fit into the current literature?
- *Describe why an interdisciplinary approach is required.* This is a critical element in the proposal for a number of reasons.
  - First, the expectation is that if students can do their graduate work through an existing program at the U of S, then this is the preferred route to follow. While the InterD program has many advantages for students, it does involve considerable work for both students and faculty. As well, students often find that the InterD program leaves them isolated and somewhat disadvantaged. Thus, students should ensure that the InterD program is the only route for doing the research work that they wish to undertake.
  - Second, students need to be able to clearly articulate what is interdisciplinary about the research they wish to do, since the nature of the interdisciplinarity influences the selection of a supervisor, the composition of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC), the selection of courses, and the nature of the research that is undertaken. Interdisciplinarity is not to be confused with being interested in many things. Rather, interdisciplinarity is about the way that questions are asked. It involves using two or more different methodologies or approaches (e.g., an economics approach and a sociological approach) to address a single question or problem.
- *Initial ideas concerning the research methodology to be employed.* While it is recognized that students will not have done the background work necessary to be able to clearly identify the research methodology that they wish to use, and while students are able to alter their research methodology as their program progresses (any changes to a student's program has to be approved by the SAC), it is nevertheless important that students have some idea of the research procedures that they will be using, since the choice of course work and the selection of an SAC is likely to be influenced by the research to be undertaken. It is also important that students not start off with too ambitious a research program — this is particularly important in interdisciplinary work, where students have to develop a familiarity with the literature in a number of areas.

## 4. Course Work

- *List all courses to be taken and briefly outline the role of each course in the proposed program.* For Master's students the minimum number of credit units required is twelve, while for Ph.D. students the minimum is six. However, students often take more than this minimum in order to develop the required background and expertise in the areas necessary for their research work.
- Interdisciplinary students are expected to take regularly scheduled graduate courses as much as possible. However, it is recognized that InterD students will often require special

topics or reading courses (e.g., 798s/898s/799s/899s) as part of their program. While special topics courses can be included as part of a student's program, the application must outline the importance of these courses in the program. Students should note that the InterD Committee, when considering proposals, will pay particular attention to proposals in which all or virtually all courses are special topics courses.

- While all the special topic courses do **not** need to be approved at admission, it is necessary that professors provide a written statement that they are willing to offer the course at the appropriate time and that approval will be sought for the course in the regular fashion. Faculty and students must be aware that approval for special topics courses must be obtained before these courses can be offered and taken. Deadlines are posted on the CGSR website (currently August 15 for fall term and December 1 for winter term).

## 5. Required Program Elements

- *Ethics approval.* Ethics considerations are essential in academic research and all students must be familiar with the issues around ethics approval (see <http://www.usask.ca/research/files/index.php?id=21> for details). To signal that they understand the ethics issues in their research (and to guard against the possibility that students will be unable to use their research because proper ethics approval was not obtained), students must include a statement in their proposal that outlines either:
  - (1) that ethics approval will not be required for their proposed research. As part of this statement, students should indicate why ethics approval is not required. They should also indicate that they are aware that they are required to obtain ethics approval should their program change in a manner that requires it; or
  - (2) the procedure to be used to obtain ethics approval for the proposed research program from the appropriate ethics review committee.

Note that actual ethics approval is not required when the InterD application is submitted. However, students do need to indicate that they will obtain approval at the appropriate time.

- *For Ph.D. proposals, students must describe the nature and timing of the Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations that will be taken.* While some students will have, as a result of discussions with their proposed supervisor and/or SAC, a clear idea of the nature and timing of these exams, it is not necessary that all students do so. A common approach is for students to indicate in their proposal that the SAC will make a decision on the nature and timing of these exams at an early meeting. As background, the purpose of the Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations is as follows:
  - The purpose of the Qualifying Examination is to ensure that the student is qualified to undertake a Ph.D. program. Typically this examination is written within the first four months of the student's program. The SAC can waive this examination if the student has an appropriate academic background (e.g., a Master's degree from a recognized university in a highly relevant area).
  - The Comprehensive Examination (often referred to as Comps or Prelims) is designed to ensure that the student has the necessary breadth and depth of knowledge in their area (in the case of InterD work, an area might encompass a number of subjects) and the ability to carry out research before they begin work on their dissertation. Typically, students who have passed the comprehensive are

said to have reached ABD (All but Dissertation) status. As a result, this exam should take place after the student has finished most (if not all) of the course work, but before the student has done any major work on the dissertation. Only in unusual circumstances should the Comprehensive Examination be used as a dissertation proposal or as an exploration of the student's dissertation area. In most cases, the Comps should take place in the first eighteen months of the student's program.

- *Nature of the INTD 990 Seminar.* All graduate students must participate in regular seminars on an on-going basis. Seminars are an important element in the research and scholarly community of the university. They provide students with access to the work and ideas of a wide range of faculty, graduate students, and visiting scholars, the opportunity to debate and discuss issues with faculty and other students, and the opportunity to present their own research. The INTD 990 seminar has two components. The first is the Interdisciplinary Seminar that is held on a monthly basis. InterD students must attend a minimum of 50 percent of these seminars over the course of the academic year. InterD students will also be required to make at least one presentation to this seminar series during their time in program. The Interdisciplinary Seminar will consist of presentations by students and faculty members. The second component of the INTD 990 is regular attendance at one or more campus seminars in an area or areas of relevance to the student's program and research. As part of their application, students must identify the seminar(s) they will attend to fulfill this second component. Further details on the INTD 990 can be found at <http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/interd/prospective/interd990.html>.

## 6. Advisory Committee

- The proposal must outline the membership and structure of the proposed Student Advisory Committee and describe the expertise and contribution provided by each of the proposed members. SACs must have at least four members (five for a Ph.D. committee). One of the members serves as the committee chair and one of the members is the student's supervisor or co-supervisor (co-supervisors count as one person). Co-supervisors must usually be from different departments or colleges, and other committee members must represent at least two departments or colleges. SACs should generally not be comprised so that all but one of the members comes from a single department.
- The SAC chair and the supervisor (or co-supervisor) must be members of graduate faculty. The remaining committee members need not be, but if they are not, then a CV must be submitted along with a statement as to the expertise they bring to the committee.
- The SAC chair is a CGSR faculty member with an interest in the proposed research and with experience in graduate programs. The chair must not be involved in the research that is being undertaken, but must ensure that the SAC is operating to the best advantage of the student and must play a key role in ensuring that the research program is interdisciplinary and academically strong. The SAC chair reports annually to the chair of the Interdisciplinary Committee regarding the progress of the student. The chair of the Graduate Committee, in turn, reports annually to the CGSR about the progress of each student. The chair of the Interdisciplinary Committee of the College of Graduate Studies and Research is an *ex officio* member of all SACs (but is not included as part of the four (or five) required members).

- Further details on the role of the SAC are in the document on the Student Advisory Committee found at <http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/interd/prospective/sac.html>.

## 7. Funding and Resources

- All students must provide a clear statement from the appropriate unit or individual indicating that the financial and physical resources necessary for the proposed program are available (e.g., space, laboratory and equipment, access to computer facilities, library resources, research and publication funds, travel, etc).
- If the student is provided with a graduate stipend, a statement indicating the amount, source, and duration of this funding is required.
- If the student is self-funded, a statement from the student to this effect is required. Students are encouraged to apply for scholarships, teaching fellowships, or other awards.

## 8. Appendices

The appendices to the application contain numerous forms, which can be found at <http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/forms.html>.

### A. Application Form (GSR 103)

- Students must complete this form.
- The application fee must accompany the application.

### B. Transcripts

- Official transcripts must be sent directly from the academic institution in question to the Interdisciplinary Program. The address for the InterD program is found at the end of this document.
- Students should leave a blank section in the proposal for the Interdisciplinary Office to insert the transcripts.

### C. TOEFL/Language Requirement

- Students without official evidence of proficiency in English will not be permitted to register or receive scholarship support. TOEFL scores are valid for two years from the date the test was taken. The CGSR retains TOEFL scores only while they are valid. The minimum TOEFL requirement for the CGSR is 550 (written) or 213 (computer based). Students are strongly advised to obtain an acceptable score before entering Canada. Other language tests that can be taken include: IELTS (6.5), CanTest (4.5), MELAB (85), Regina Test of English Proficiency (RTEP, 77%), and EAP (50) through the U of S Centre for Second Language Instruction.

### D. Reference Forms (GSR 101)

- Three references are required, and each referee must complete reference form GSR 101. The referees must address the student's ability to work in an interdisciplinary environment. Referees **must** send their references **directly** to the Interdisciplinary Program (see address at the end of the document). Referees may fax their references initially, but a hard copy must follow.
- Students should leave a blank section in the proposal for the Interdisciplinary Office to insert the references.

### E. Program of Studies Form (PhD — GSR 207; Master's — GSR 208)

- Students must complete this form.

#### F. Special Topics Courses (INTD 798, 799, 898, 899)

- This section should include a written statement from the faculty members offering the Special Topics Courses that they are willing to offer the course and that they will obtain approval for the course at the appropriate time.
- Applications for approval of Special Topics Courses (please use form GSR 204) must be made separately from the InterD application.
- Some Special Topics Courses may require an examination exemption (please use form GSR 401).

#### G. Correspondence

- Letter from proposed supervisor explaining that funding, support arrangements, and provision of adequate facilities needed for the proposed research are available and that the proposed supervisor accepts responsibility for managing the program.
- Note from each of the committee members indicating that they are willing to serve on the committee.
- Letter from the proposed supervisor's department head or dean confirming support and facilities arrangements, and where applicable, funding.
- Letter from candidate agreeing to the above-noted arrangements.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Interdisciplinary Studies website: <http://www.usask.ca/cgsr/interd>

College of Graduate Studies and Research website: <http://www.usask.ca/cgsr>

Please address correspondence to:

Interdisciplinary Studies Office  
 College of Graduate Studies and Research  
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 107 Administration Place  
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 E-mail: [interd@admin.usask.ca](mailto:interd@admin.usask.ca)

#### Interdisciplinary Committee

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