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Academic Chairpersons Conference
Proposal
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Creating a Sustainable Interdisciplinary Humanities Department

During the 2015-2016 academic year, five small undergraduate humanities and social sciences departments, plus one graduate program, inaugurated a new Department of Humanities. As part of this process of merging departments and disciplines, old majors were phased out and a new major was developed: “Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities.” Additionally, in order to help students frame the new emphasis on interdisciplinary thinking, faculty members in the department developed an overarching theme—“masks”—as its first department theme on which curricular and co-curricular activities could be planned.

In this brown-bag lunch session, the leaders involved in the process of forming and maintaining this department will discuss the lessons learned in its first year, and how to apply those lessons moving forward. Some of the topics to be addressed will include:

- The current trend of merging departments within small, liberal arts colleges as well as universities and how to negotiate and thrive within that merge;
- How to define interdisciplinary work at the department level in a way that fits within an institution’s mission and strategic plan;
- How to foster interdisciplinary thinking, programming, and partnerships across both faculty and students who are more comfortable with traditional disciplinary boundaries.

While this session is focused on some of the particulars of a still-new Department of Humanities, the challenges faced and the lessons learned by the faculty leadership are applicable to participants who find themselves in newly consolidated organizational structures such as STEM Departments, or in situations where such actions are being discussed and/are planned.