Julie Thompson Klein is a professor of humanities in English and interdisciplinary studies at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. She is past president of the Association for Integrative Studies (AIS) and former editor of the AIS journal, Issues in Integrative Studies. Klein consults widely both nationally and internationally and is the author and editor of many books, including Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice; Crossing Boundaries; and Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity. She is also associate editor of the forthcoming Oxford Handbook on Interdisciplinarity.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), headquartered in Washington, D.C., is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Founded in 1915 by college presidents, AAC&U now represents the entire spectrum of American colleges and universities—large and small, public and private, two-year and four-year. AAC&U comprises more than 1,200 accredited colleges and universities that collectively educate more than seven million students every year.

Praise for Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures

“Klein’s analysis shows convincingly that from research in the sciences to new graduate-level programs and departments, to new designs for general education, interdisciplinarity is now prevalent throughout American colleges and universities. Klein documents trends, traces historical patterns and precedents, and provides practical advice. Going directly to the heart of our institutional realities, she focuses attention on some of the more challenging aspects of bringing together ambitious goals for interdisciplinarity with institutional budgets, and governance systems. A singular strength of this book, then, is the practical advice it provides about such sticky issues as program review, faculty development, tenure and promotion, hiring, and the political economy of interdisciplinarity. . . . We know that readers everywhere will find [this book] simultaneously truly illuminating and intensely useful.”

—from the foreword by Carol Geary Schneider, president, Association of American Colleges and Universities

“Klein reveals how universities can move beyond glib rhetoric about being interdisciplinary toward pervasive full interdisciplinarity. Institutions that heed her call for restructured intellectual environments are most likely to thrive in the new millennium.”

—from William H. Newell, professor, Interdisciplinary Studies, Miami University, and executive director, Association for Integrative Studies

“In true interdisciplinary fashion, Julie Klein integrates a tremendous amount of material into this book to tell the story of interdisciplinarity across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. And she does so both from the theoretical perspective of ‘understanding’ interdisciplinarity and from the practical vantage of ‘doing’ interdisciplinarity. This book is a must-read for faculty and administrators thinking about ‘understanding’ interdisciplinarity and from the practical vantage of ‘doing’ interdisciplinarity.”

—from Diana Rheens, director, Knowledge Institutions Program, and director, Digital Media and Learning Project, Social Science Research Council

Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures

A Model for Strength and Sustainability

Julie Thompson Klein

Foreword by Carol Geary Schneider

Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures

“Interdisciplinarity” has become a mantra for change in higher education and is embodied in a rich variety of forms and practices that challenge how we think about knowledge, research, and teaching and learning. Yet, despite widespread desire for change on campuses, proponents are often uncertain about how to go about planning, implementing, and sustaining interdisciplinary programs and projects.

Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures offers administrators, faculty, and planning groups a primer for interdisciplinary change with a portfolio of practical, concrete strategies for actualizing this change. These proven techniques are anchored in a conceptual framework that unites insights from organizational theory, higher education studies, and the literature on interdisciplinarity.

Creating campus cultures that enable rather than impede interdisciplinary work and thought requires a systematic approach to identifying current tensions and interests, leveraging existing resources, benchmarking best practices, building capacity and critical mass, targeting strategic initiatives, developing institutional guidelines, and creating a platform for higher levels of strength and sustainability. Topics also include criteria of program review, the interdisciplinary campus lifecycle, and endowment building. These strategies are not meant as one-size-fits-all prescriptions for every campus or in universal formulas or sets of rules, but rather provide informed insights of nationwide developments and lessons of theory and practice that will improve local decision making and implementation.

Sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures is an essential resource aimed at developing and sustaining institutional support for interdisciplinary work and giving campuses the tools needed to ensure that their work is successful and sustainable.
CREATING INTERDISCIPLINARY CAMPUS CULTURES
CREATING INTERDISCIPLINARY CAMPUS CULTURES

A Model for Strength and Sustainability

Julie Thompson Klein

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To my colleagues and students who fought with strength and integrity against closure of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Wayne State University
The Author

Julie Thompson Klein is professor of humanities in interdisciplinary studies/English and Faculty Fellow in the Office for Teaching and Learning at Wayne State University. She has held visiting positions in Japan and New Zealand and was a Fulbright Professor in Nepal. Klein received the Kenneth Boulding Award for outstanding scholarship on interdisciplinarity, including the books and monographs *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (1990), *Crossing Boundaries* (1996), *Mapping Interdisciplinary Studies* (1999), and *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity* (2005). Her edited and coedited books include *Interdisciplinary Studies Today* (1994), *Transdisciplinarity* (2001), *Interdisciplinary Education in K–12 and College* (2002), and *Promoting Interdisciplinary Research* (2005). Klein has lectured on interdisciplinarity throughout North America, Europe, South Asia, Latin America, and Australia. She was also Senior Fellow at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and served on national task forces of the Society for Values in Higher Education (Interdisciplinary Studies), AAC&U (Integrative Learning), and the Association for Integrative Studies (Accreditation). In addition, she has advised the National Institutes of Health, National Academy of Sciences, and National Science Foundation on interdisciplinary research. Klein is currently coeditor of the University of Michigan Press series Digital Humanities@digitalculturebooks and is working on a book mapping the field of digital humanities. She is also coeditor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*. 
I majored in history when I was in college and later went on to earn a doctorate in the same field. But both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, I really thought of myself as an “early modern studies” student. Intentionally and extensively, I added numerous courses from multiple disciplines studying early modern developments in religion, philosophy, art history, literature, political science, and anthropology, always with the goal of building a fuller understanding for myself of the contours and contests of my chosen area of work.

This was, however, an entirely independent project. My mentors did not disapprove it, but neither did they at any point see it as their role to help me integrate my far-flung and multidisciplinary studies.

Early on, I began to realize that the material that really interested me—the interplay across religion, politics, and contested cultures—scarcely “belonged” at all to the “discipline” of history. Indeed, there were entire other disciplines that existed specifically to probe each of these areas of human experience: religion, political science, and anthropology, not to mention the then emerging fields of cultural studies. Where, then, should I locate myself? Should I think of myself as “interdisciplinary”? What might this mean when, across some twenty-plus years of formal education, I had never taken a single course or ventured into a single department that presented itself as interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, or even multidisciplinary?

My work might be cross-disciplinary, but I was a solo actor. What would it mean in practice to make some form of cross-disciplinarity a primary organizing principle for my own educational identity and institutional location—whether in scholarship or teaching?
As I struggled to make sense of all this conceptually, methodologically, and professionally, I remained, like the majority of academics in my generation, largely on my own. Some brave spirits—many, in fact—went out and founded dynamic new interdisciplinary fields, giving birth to the extraordinary intellectual fertility of the current academy, a fertility that Julie Klein maps brilliantly in this book. But this did not occur to me, and in any event, such areas as ethnic, environmental, and women’s studies seemed to have a considerably greater urgency about them than my own particular interest in post-Reformation religious and political landscapes.

I mention my personal intellectual history because I have come to believe that the disjunction I experienced—the tension between my actual work and the academy’s dominant organizational and educational structures—is not only widespread but absolutely commonplace. Julie Klein’s fine study tells us, however, that we do not need to simply live with these disjunctions. We have reached a point where we are starting to see both how to change them, and that we must.

The twentieth-century academy organized itself firmly around the concept of disciplinary conceptual structures, problems, and methods. The institutional and psychosocial legacies of that decision live on into the twenty-first-century academy. Indeed, in Europe, this legacy not only lives on but is taking on a second life in what is known as “the Bologna process.” Through the Bologna process, dozens of countries have agreed not only to set clear intellectual standards for what undergraduates need to achieve in their studies, but to do so by “tuning” specific academic disciplines. Tuning is a term meant to ensure that there will be a shared understanding, across institutions and countries, of what it means in terms of knowledge, methodological skills, and applied work to earn a degree in a particular subject area—whether history, biology, or business.

One could almost say that since the academy failed to clarify the meaning and standards for disciplines in the twentieth century, European scholars are working now to tidy up that unfinished business—mapping the intended contours of “the disciplines” for the twenty-first century.

But in truth, as Julie Klein makes clear in this rich and enormously useful analysis of the academy’s actual scholarly terrain,
we have already entered a different world. The boundaries have blurred, and the creative energy of our age is decidedly cross-disciplinary. Undone by tens of thousands of scholars whose interests were as unfounded as my own, the entire concept of “the discipline” has increasingly taken on the stance of fiction, and an inconvenient fiction at that.

For dozens of different but intersecting reasons—developments and tensions within established fields, creative work that cuts across fields, the deepening connections between the academy and the communities it serves, and the actual interests of contemporary scholars—both intellectual work and undergraduate teaching and learning move restlessly across the so-called disciplinary boundaries. Across all the major domains of academic work, with established fields as well as in new fields, we have broken free of anything we might think of as a disciplinary framework for pathbreaking intellectual work.

These developments notwithstanding, however, our institutional structures for both faculty and undergraduate learning remain firmly rooted in an earlier set of understandings. Disciplines, as Klein notes in Chapter Four, are “systems of power with control over resources, identities, and patterns of research and education. Disciplines constitute economies of value . . . encoded in canons of work and the professional apparatus of publication.”

Faced with this deeply rooted contradiction and the resultant tensions between generative academic work and the structures of actual power, American higher education has enormous work before it. One priority is that of understanding the scope and reach of the many emerging forms of cross-disciplinary work. We need to understand the world we actually inherit.

A second priority is that of providing new forms of institutional support, recognition, and reward for those who do this work, whether as scholars or in their curricular leadership and teaching. The third priority—an arena in which the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has joined hands with interdisciplinary scholars and teachers across the United States—is that of rethinking teaching and learning, and the larger project of providing a liberal or horizon-expanding education in light of this new interdisciplinary dynamism.

This book provides guidance on all of these issues. Klein’s analysis shows convincingly that from research in the sciences to
new graduate-level programs and departments, to new designs for general education, interdisciplinarity is now prevalent throughout American colleges and universities. She maps the drivers of interdisciplinary changes in scholarship and curricula and demonstrates forcefully that developing and sustaining interdisciplinary studies is essential to providing students with complex capacities so important to navigating the world of work, learning, and citizenship today.

Klein documents trends, traces historical patterns and precedents, and provides practical advice. Going directly to the heart of our institutional realities, she focuses attention on some of the more challenging aspects of bringing together ambitious goals for interdisciplinary vitality with institutional, budgetary, and governance systems. A singular strength of this book, then, is the practical advice it provides about such nitty-gritty issues as program review, faculty development, tenure and promotion, hiring, and the political economy of interdisciplinarity.

Klein’s overview of campus educational practices meshes with what we at AAC&U see in our own work with campuses on the revitalization of curriculum, teaching, and learning. Spanning every kind of college and university (two-year and four-year, public and private, large and small), AAC&U members overwhelmingly are incorporating more integrative and engaged forms of learning in both general education and major programs (AAC&U, 2009). Whether the actual course of study is described as disciplinary or interdisciplinary, American higher education is now engaging students with big questions and real problems. Almost invariably, those problems span conventional disciplinary boundaries.

As Klein describes in her comprehensive overview, the American college curriculum now prioritizes integration, cross-cultural interaction, and the development of cross-functional and interdisciplinary capacities—capacities that are precisely what today’s world demands of college graduates. Whether they proceed to graduate school and engage in complex research in nanotechnology or biomedical engineering or directly to a workplace increasingly defined by innovation and globalization, today’s college graduates will be challenged every day to integrate their knowledge and skills and apply learning to new settings and forms of complexity.
Klein also forcefully shows that trends in interdisciplinarity are driven not only by the changing nature of research or the demands of a globalized economy. To be a responsible citizen in today’s world requires a scope and depth of learning that enables individuals to understand and navigate dramatic forces—physical, cultural, economic, technological—that directly affect the quality, character, and perils of the world in which they live. With fields changing so rapidly and unscripted problems abundant on every front, we cannot hope to teach students a discipline that will work for all purposes. But we can teach them that in both their professional lives and lives as citizens and community and family members, they need to look far and wide, analyze rigorously, synthesize judiciously, and take anomalies and contradictions directly into account.

Klein’s work has been an important resource for AAC&U as this association has made integrative and interdisciplinary learning an ever more central part of our vision for twenty-first-century liberal learning and educational quality. In College Learning for the New Global Century, the signature report from AAC&U’s decade-long initiative on Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), the authors affirm that teaching students how to integrate their learning across multiple disciplines and contexts is essential, not optional, in the campus framework for educational excellence. The LEAP report also calls for new campus leadership and action to make intentional integrative learning a defining feature for liberal education and, indeed, for American higher education. We noted in the LEAP report that “with campus experimentation already well advanced . . . it is time to move from ‘pilot efforts’ to full-scale commitments.”

Klein’s book demonstrates convincingly that the academy is indeed poised to move in precisely that direction. We are proud to partner with Jossey-Bass in publishing this important study, and we know that readers everywhere will find it simultaneously richly illuminating and intensively useful.

Carol Geary Schneider
President
Association of American Colleges and Universities
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Julie Thompson Klein
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