



Cross Disciplinary Learning Development in Higher Education

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There is growing awareness within higher education and funding agencies that universities should work to tackle the challenges faced by societies both globally and locally and that these challenges rarely fall neatly into a single discipline framework. Stone et al (2009) note that as society has become more complex, research questions have changed, and the “structures of earlier times no longer accommodate the research needed and the teaching that emanates from this research” [1]. Increasingly, scholars are looking across traditional disciplinary boundaries in new and interesting ways to address socio-cultural concerns. Research into the rise and prominence of interdisciplinary collaboration prompted Stone et al (2009) to suggest that discussion within faculties has tended to shift from the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to “pragmatic questions of how to develop and sustain interdisciplinary programs” [2].

In the field of the built environment, a gap exists between entrenched traditional discipline-based education and rapidly changing developments in contemporary practice. Edwards et al (2009) suggest that “given the number of agencies and the complexity of institutional and professional relationships in the production, management and regulation of the built environment, many students entering built environment professions leave university without a sufficient understanding of these diverse actors, and the formal and informal interactions and social dynamics between them” [3].

This paper examines the proposed introduction of common learning experiences for students in the Built Environment Faculty (BE) at the University of New South Wales to more adequately prepare students for future professional settings. It draws on recent literature on interdisciplinary learning and teaching, critical thinking, research and inquiry, and the student experience, both in the context of BE disciplines and more broadly. This paper frames discussion on how to develop students’ interdisciplinary understanding and examines what form these learning experiences might take in a current case study example.