

## MA-IS Application Writing Sample

*To help the MA-IS program gain better understanding of your objectives for pursuing graduate studies and assess your current analytical writing skills, please read one of the two essays attached at the bottom of this page: choose either "An Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Stewardship of the Global Commons" by Douglas C. Bennett, Grant H. Cornwell, Haifa Jamal Al-Lail and Celeste Schenck or "Is Your Professional Identity Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary, or Transdisciplinary? And, Why that Matters for the Future of Work" by Sarabeth Berk Bickerton. Then write an original essay in your own words of 3-5 pages (900-1500 words) in response to the prompt below.*

### **Prompt**

Please engage your chosen essay's perspective on the value and necessity of interdisciplinary and globalized education from the standpoint of your objectives for pursuing a graduate degree; what benefits of this approach might enrich your own pursuit of advanced study in the Master of Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies program? Briefly summarize the article's argument, then analyze specifically how the authors' contentions resonate with your own background, experience, mindset, and goals for your pursuit of an interdisciplinary master's degree.

## **An education for the twenty-first century: stewardship of the global commons**

**Authors:** Douglas C. Bennett, Grant H. Cornwell, Haifa Jamal Al-Lail and Celeste Schenck

**Date:** Fall 2012

**Publisher:** Association of American Colleges and Universities

IN THIS BRIEF PROPOSAL, we are trying to envision a foundational higher education for the twenty-first century, an education that has some claim to adequacy for the possibilities of human beings today on this earth. We are writing this to provide more depth to the idea of "global education," a term that has become commonplace but that, too often, is put forward without adequate substance. We call this "An Education for the Twenty-First Century: Stewardship of the Global Commons." We take on this task as members of the Global Liberal Arts Alliance, a consortium of twenty-five colleges and universities cooperating to advance the theory and practice of undergraduate education designed to prepare graduates for citizenship and leadership in the highly globalized twenty-first century.

We believe it is important to imagine an education fit for global possibilities because ours has become a world in which connections and consequences reach across borders and leap oceans. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it may have been appropriate to frame education in national terms, but no more. The challenges of the twenty-first century--the possibilities of prosperity, of peace, of health, of fulfillment--all unfold on a global stage. What a few people do in Boston or Bangkok, in Riyadh or Rome or Rio de Janeiro can affect others at a considerable distance. The earth has become a place of global cultures, in all of their valued particularity, and increasingly a global commons, in all of its necessary interdependence. An appropriate university education for everyone, not just a privileged elite, must prepare women and men for participation in these cultures and this commons. Ours is world being transformed by transnational flows of goods and capital, peoples and practices; by the unraveling of the nation state; and by the rapid rise of new forms of instantaneous electronic communication. There is an urgent need to prepare young people to negotiate such complexity, and to enter into thoughtful stewardship of initiatives, resources, languages, and cultures.

We know that there are many approaches to higher education across the world, some more narrowly focused on preparation for vocation, some aiming to educate the whole person. We do not intend our conception of global education as a singular conception of education to be implemented everywhere in the same way. We want, rather, to articulate the main features of any education that can be truly adequate to global challenges. In relation to current educational systems around the world, this is an approach that is generally more interdisciplinary, more collaborative, and more attuned to stewardship than to instrumental effort or narrow self-interest. It is also an education that compels students, and those who teach them, to come to know not just that which is familiar and already "one's own," but to seek understanding of others and to welcome the opportunity to learn what those who are different from them have discovered about our common humanity and our common habitation of this planet.

We conceive of this education as having three kinds of elements, which may well be best learned together. It requires the acquisition of some literacies: scientific, cultural, and global--understandings that are both substantive and, because necessarily unfinished, include the capabilities to continue learning. It requires the learning of some skills that are essential to effective action. And it requires acquisition of some dispositions that promote constructive rather than destructive engagement with others. We share this proposal to invite others into the conversation. We encourage others to comment on and add to our work in envisioning a foundational education for the twenty-first century--a global education that prepares students for effective stewardship of the global commons.

### **Literacies for global stewardship**

The following areas of knowledge are important for effective agency. What do our graduates need to know to be able to exercise stewardship?

*Scientific understanding:*

\* The capacity to use scientific knowledge and methods to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions in order to make decisions about the natural world and the changes made to it through human activity (1)

*Cultural understanding:*

- \* A comparative and historical grasp of world religious traditions and practices of faith
- \* A comparative and historical understanding of the variety of human cultures as expressed in music, the arts, and literature
- \* A sense of world history focused more on the movement of peoples across the globe, intercultural encounters, and cultural creolization than on nations, dynasties, empires, and hegemonic regimes; mastery of world geography supporting such an approach
- \* A sophisticated understanding of the social construction of identities and the dynamics of positionality--race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and nationality--involved in the distribution of power

*Understanding of global issues:*

- \* A critical understanding of the workings of global capitalism, global patterns of production and consumption, and the global flows of people, commodities, and money
- \* A grasp of the dynamics of globalization as a complex, disjunctive, and overlapping set of "scapes," as described by Arjun Appadurai (2) to include ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples; we would add envirosaples and cultursaples
- \* A grasp of the transdisciplinary and transnational nature of global problems and the sciences that illuminate them--problems related to health, food, poverty, security, climate change, and the environment
- \* An understanding of the philosophy and history, the possibilities and limitations of human rights skills for global engagement
- \* Communicating meaningfully using expert writing, speaking, listening, and negotiating skills; deploying electronic communication technologies with rhetorical sensitivity to the potentials and limitations of their various modes
- \* Developing the capacity to see, appreciate, and draw novel insight from cultural differences and the ability to work, negotiate, socialize, and play with people of different cultural backgrounds
- \* Mastering a foreign language, learning to translate from one language to another, and, by means of both experiences, gaining access to another culture
- \* Using mathematics and statistics, and building and using models of complex systems
- \* Cultivating discernment by searching and sorting through information from multiple sources, assessing the validity of truth claims, and interrogating one's own most basic assumptions
- \* Producing original research and new knowledge in the service of problem solving
- \* Praxis: taking theory to practice and thought to action
- \* Mastering "scalar thinking": a method of Google Earth--style reasoning that permits us to zoom in and zoom out on issues in ways that reveal the interconnections between the local and the global; at each scale of analysis, different features and relationships emerge

\* Triangulating differences using global positioning: a GPS is only reliable if it is coordinating information from a variety of differently situated sources; this skill entails taking into account disparate points of view--disciplinary, cultural, ideological--and being able to discern where they can be reconciled into a more complex and complete understanding and also the limits of that reconciliation

### **Dispositions for global engagement**

- \* Respect: a recognition of the dignity inherent in humanity, of human rights, and of our responsibilities to others
- \* Vulnerability: a disposition not to recoil at difference, but to see encounters with difference as opportunities for growth and learning, for innovation, and for joyful interaction with others
- \* Hospitality: a disposition to feel at home in the world and to make others feel welcome and valued
- \* Compassion: a disposition undergirded by the awareness that suffering is an essential dimension of the human condition and that suffering can be ameliorated by the comfort of empathy
- \* Agency: the resolve to transform commitment into action by promoting change, by resisting the unacceptable, and by championing justice
- \* Agility: the capacity to continually revise one's notion of one's own identity and that of others in constellation with new cultures, persons, and experiences
- \* Fairness: a disposition toward egalitarian distribution of power and privilege, and a commitment to democratic processes
- \* Service: a commitment to support the wellbeing of others and the global commons more broadly
- \* Leadership: the proclivity to stand up among others so as to take initiative constructively, generously, and persistently.

The purpose of a twenty-first-century education is to produce graduates who recognize themselves to be of the world and who also assume responsibility for the world. Such graduates respect the specificities of particular cultures as well as the need for a global commons. As stewards of such cultures and commons, they draw upon multiple disciplines and viewpoints to address the world's problems, and they work collaboratively with others to solve them.

DOUGLAS C. BENNETT is former president and professor of politics at Earlham College, GRANT H. CORNWELL is president of the College of Wooster, HAIFA JAMAL AL-LAIL is president of Effat University (Saudi Arabia), and CELESTE SCHENCK is president of the American University of Paris (France) .

**Copyright:** COPYRIGHT 2012 Association of American Colleges and Universities  
<http://www.aacu-edu.org>

# Is your professional identity multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary? And, why that matters for the future of work

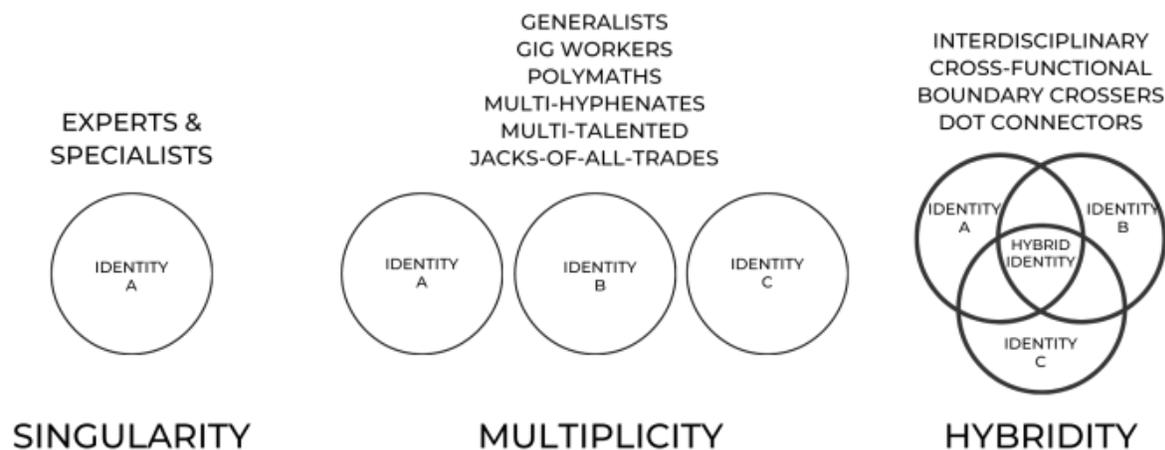
Sarabeth Berk Bickerton, Ph.D.

Founder, More Than My Title- Changing how we see, know, and value each other for who we are in our work. Keynote Speaker and professional identity researcher

Published Jul 6, 2021

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/your-professional-identity-multidisciplinary-why-work-berk-ph-d->

I created a framework of professional identity that states **there are three types: singularity, multiplicity, and hybridity.**



I developed this because there's a gap in how we talk and think about professional identity.

This framework is critical because it expands outdated research of workers as being binary (either/or) or multi (many), and adds a third option, hybridity (both/and).

**No other framework exists that demonstrates this in terms of professional identity, and it's overdue.**

Now, let's go deeper.

I'm about to explain a model that shows a progression of disciplinarity in terms of complexity, and it's similar to mine on professional identity. This model reinforces why hybridity is a significant addition to how we think about talent, talent development and talent mobility.

As we know, workers today accumulate knowledge in many disciplines. We often don't know what to do with them, where they belong in the workforce, or what role is the best fit.

Talent managers and career development specialists do their best to figure out how to help individuals whose disciplinary knowledge goes beyond one discipline, but it's tricky.

I believe this next section sheds light on that problem.

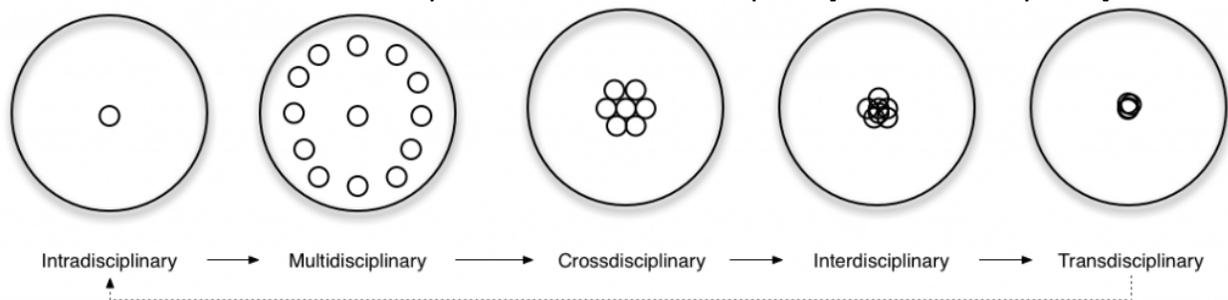
## THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF DISCIPLINARITIES

A discipline, in its simplest definition, is a branch of knowledge. Your college major is a discipline. That thing you taught yourself is part of a discipline. You can know a little (or a lot) in a variety of disciplines.

In our careers, we become known for our subject matter expertise (aka disciplines): communications, computer science, wellness, etc.

If we add prefixes to the word "discipline," it changes the meaning. When we call someone *multidisciplinary* or *interdisciplinary*, we need to be intentional about how we use that term and why. If you've been using the wrong one, you're about to find out.

Here's a sketch that shows a spectrum from intradisciplinary to transdisciplinary:



This image was created by [Jensenius](#) who also provides these definitions:

- **Intradisciplinary:** working within a single discipline.
- **Crossdisciplinary:** viewing one discipline from the perspective of another.
- **Multidisciplinary:** people from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.

- **Interdisciplinary:** integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis of approaches.
- **Transdisciplinary:** creating a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives.

What you're seeing is an evolution from single to multi to "transcendence" or as [Stember](#) articulates:

*"...this is a hierarchical structure of increasing complexity, from intradisciplinary work being wholly within one discipline, to transdisciplinary being a complex 'greater than the sum of its parts' transcendence of boundaries."*

Notice in the last two images, *inter* and *trans*, the smaller circles create either a Venn diagram or a wholly unified circle of circles.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR HYBRID PROFESSIONALS?

The point here is that the way we talk about people's disciplinary abilities and skills matters as do their professional identities. Calling someone crossdisciplinary versus interdisciplinary are two very different ways of describing how they work.

Do you intend to hire a multidisciplinary person or a transdisciplinary person? Why would you want one over the other? These are things that need to be considered in HR hiring decisions and team management practices.

When we say a worker is multi-talented or multidimensional, in terms of a multidisciplinary lens, that means they have many professional identities in many areas of knowledge.

When we say a worker is hybrid, from a disciplinary lens, that means they are at the *inter* or *trans* levels (depending on the person and their level of disciplinary complexity). This worker is either integrating different disciplines and identities together or forging new paths at the transcendent level.

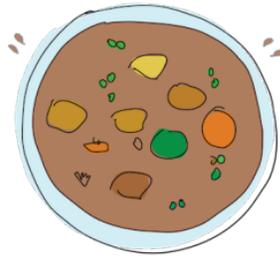
To make this more concrete, I love this illustration by [Jo Bailey and Kate Hannah](#) that brings disciplinarity back to food. (If you've seen my [TEDx](#), you know I love a pizza analogy, so this one takes the cake!)

More disciplines,  
boundaries transcended

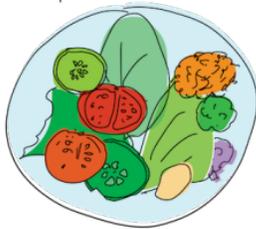
Transdisciplinary



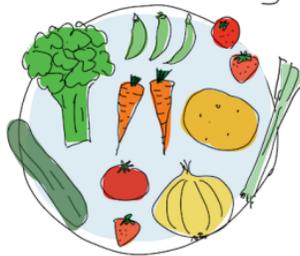
Interdisciplinary



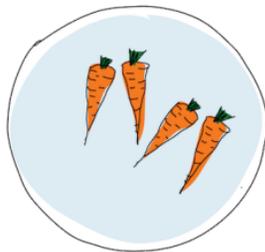
Multidisciplinary



Cross disciplinary



Intradisciplinary



More tasty!

More tasty!

Fewer disciplines,  
boundaries not  
challenged

What stands out in this illustration is the progression from simple to complex. Identifiable ingredients (the salad) become less distinguishable (the stew) until they eventually converge into the creation of something entirely new (the cake) that "transcends" boundaries. Transdisciplinarity looks nothing like the original ingredients because it unifies into an entirely new form.

My favorite note in this illustration is this, "**More tasty!**" To me this means that the more complexity and transdisciplinarity there is, the more divine and delicious the final product becomes.

Who enjoys cake more than carrots?

This is what it means to be a hybrid professional.

Not only is hybrid professional identity the sum of many parts, but it is a holistic creation that defies categorization and becomes a new type of professional. The more rare and complex the hybridity and indistinguishable the parts, the more likely a worker is to be at the *trans* level, transcending boundaries.

## FINAL TAKEAWAYS

1. The next time you call someone cross, multi, inter, or transdisciplinary, think carefully as to why.
2. People who are hybrid professionals possess interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary identities.
3. If someone has many professional identities, consider if they are a salad, stew, or a cake.
4. And, if you're hiring an employee, creating a job posting, or looking for a job, how are you describing the position or yourself in terms of hierarchy of disciplinarity? Are you listing various disciplines as job duties or are you explaining how those disciplines are united?