To: University Graduate Committee (UGC)  
    Faculty Senate

From: Academic Program Working Group (APWG)  
    Steve Cherry, Doug Downs, Bill Brown, Kirsten Ostergaard  
    Michael Babcock (Chair)

Date: March 6, 2016

Re: Level II proposal: Individual Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program

Overview
This is a proposal initiated by the Dean of the Graduate School for the creation of an Individual Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. This program would serve students that have completed a Master’s degree or equivalent degree program of study that includes at least 20 credit hours of graded graduate course work. Interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs are intended to prepare student for a global approach to problem solving and career advancement. The proposed program will support the integration and collaboration among different disciplines that cannot be achieved by existing MSU graduate program.

Curriculum and Academic Quality
Prospective applicants will provide a written description of the program concept and goals. The proposed program of study must be approved and supported by at least two or more heads of the relevant academic units that offer the Ph.D. degree.

The curriculum is individualized and developed by the student’s committee within one year of submitting an application to the program. The student’s committee, department heads of the academic units involved, the Advisory Committee (see below), and the Graduate Dean must approve the curriculum. The proposal describes a detailed description of the admission process.

Students in this program will be held the same policies and requirements of existing Ph.D. programs at MSU. These requirements include residence, continuous registration, grade point average, committee appointments, time in program, dissertation, and oral defense.
Resources
The Graduate School plans to offer 12 credits of tuition waiver in the first year of study and a Meritorious Fellowship ($5K/AY) to each applicant that is fully admitted based on the admissions process and requirements. Thus, departments will be expected to provide a stipend during the first year (if applicable), and develop strategies to support students during the remaining time in the interdisciplinary program.

Implementation
The Graduate School will oversee and manage the program. An Advisory Committee, consist of 4 to 6 faculty members from established doctoral programs, will be appointed by the Graduate Dean in consultation with the UGC. The Advisory Committee advises the Dean on admission decisions and conducts an annual review of student progress.

Demand and Support
According to the proposal, the MSU Graduate School receives 5 to 10 inquiries each year requesting information about interdisciplinary graduate programs. The University of Montana, which currently offers an interdisciplinary Ph.D., reports an average enrollment of 4 students/year.

Evidence that interdisciplinary Ph.D. programs are valuable is presented. The National Science Foundation (NSF) is cited as an organization that is promoting these types of programs. The APWG considered an article (Millar, 2013) that examined data from the 2008 Survey of Doctorate Recipients to explore the relationship between interdisciplinary dissertation research and career-related indicators. The author concluded that conducting interdisciplinary dissertation research increases the likelihood of obtaining a position within academia.

A UGC report summarizing perceived strengths of the program was provided. The UGC voted to approve the final proposal on February 5th, 2016.

Summary
This proposal for the creation of an interdisciplinary Ph.D. offers evidence of academic quality monitoring, potential for student demand, and resource commitment. APWG is supportive of this new program and believes that it represents an opportunity for our institution.