

Individual Interdisciplinary PhD Reference Guide, Montana State University-Bozeman

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1. Introduction:

The Individual Interdisciplinary PhD (IIP) is for students to pursue an area of study that is not available in existing graduate programs at Montana State University. The IIP program provides the opportunity to integrate knowledge, skills, data, ideas, and insights extending beyond a single academic discipline. Students who undertake this degree come from a variety of fields and backgrounds with the common desire to conduct multidisciplinary scholarship while developing a unique blend of knowledge, methodology, and expertise. To meet program admission criteria, a IIP applicant must propose an interdisciplinary area of scholarship, as well as courses in a program of study (POS). The POS must incorporate a minimum combination of two domains of knowledge and/or disciplinary academic units at the university and the applicant must have in place a **(pre)designated** faculty committee.

2. Application and Admission Procedure:

The two main differences in the application compared to a student applying for a single discipline are the proposal and establishing your committee by asking them to serve as reference letter writers for your application...

1. Application [guidelines and requirements](#) center around a [Full Proposal](#) (in place of a statement of purpose) The Full Proposal should include a description of the interdisciplinary scholarship and a discussion how their proposed IIP program of study could not be undertaken in any established graduate program at the university.
2. A Graduate Committee of three (3) MSU faculty members is required including one faculty member that will act as Committee Chair. Note: You will outline the makeup of your committee by listing the faculty committee member and adding brief biographical sketches (2 page) for each member in a section of your proposal titled "Committee Members and Bio sketches." All three of these faculty members must write letters of recommendation for your application. The Committee Chair will state in their letter that they agree to be your committee chair.

Other details of the application are identical to applying to any other graduate program, including the requirements for international students. **Step 1. Information Gathering:**

- i. Read the information for the [Individual Interdisciplinary PhD Program](#) and [IIP FAQ Page](#) on The Graduate School Website to review official program criteria.
- ii. Determine whether your program could not be completed in any established graduate program at Montana State University by reviewing and researching doctoral level program options and requirements listed on [The Graduate School website](#) and by asking yourself these questions: 1) Do you have a project or research focus that does not fit within a traditional academic discipline? 2) Does MSU have the necessary faculty who hold doctorates and are subject area experts that will be able to support you on your project and IIP degree completion? 3) Are you ready to research and address big challenges that cross over multiple and diverse disciplines?
- iii. Make an appointment and meet with the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs Manager to discuss the IIP application process.

Step 2: (Pre)Proposal and Committee Formation

- i. Prior to applying, develop a preliminary proposal draft and description (abstract) of your research interests to inform potential faculty advisors and committee members of your goals. For example, describe the area of research, your relevant background, the areas of knowledge you plan to explore and develop in your program. It is also useful to include your future academic and professional goals.
- ii. Formally identify at least three potential faculty committee members. These faculty should span the range of disciplinary areas you will need for your project. One of these faculty members needs to agree to serve as the chair of your committee (in some cases this is aided by researching department faculty directories on Montana State University's website). Contact the potential committee members to review and discuss your formal proposal and program of study for input before submitting your application officially. One practical approach is to identify your Committee Chair and work with this person to select at least two (2) additional faculty who meet the criteria to serve on your graduate committee
- iii. Note, in the first year of your PhD program you will need to identify two more committee members to form your final committee of five.
- iv. The academic unit corresponding to your Committee Chair is the official "home" department of the IIP student and is ultimately responsible for providing the IIP student with practical assistance (through the department's graduate coordinator) and to offer the IIP student the same rights and privileges as for other graduate students (for instance, access to teaching assistantships, office space, etc.). The Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs Manager housed in the Graduate School will also assist IIP students.

Step 3: Complete Proposal, and Apply

- i. After you seek feedback from your committee regarding the quality and feasibility of the proposal, complete the final IIP Proposal according to instructions listed in [Developing the IIP Proposal](#) .
- ii. Once your identified faculty have agreed to serve as committee members and approved your proposal content you will add a section to your IIP proposal labeled

“Committee Membership and Bio sketches,” where you list each faculty committee member, their academic department affiliation, and briefly explain their background and role in supporting your research proposal and program of study.

- iii. In the application, you will request three (3) letters of recommendation and please list your committee chair and at least two other committee members.
- iv. Submit your application according to the full list of requirements on the [Developing the IIP Proposal](#) page and the following application deadlines:
 - Fall: Applications due between December 1-August 1
 - Spring: Applications due between July 1-December 15
 - Summer: Applications due between December 1-April 15

Step 4: Considerations and additional requirements for International Students.

International applicants seeking admission to the IIP program must be aware of additional requirements as outlined by our [International Application Process](#). Helpful information and resources are also available through the [MSU International Student and Scholar Services](#).

Part II: Program Planning and Success

Program Requirements and Options:

A. Plan of Study

Develop your [program of study](#) (POS) under the guidance of your committee. The exact course list will vary depending on your background, including both prior education and experience. The courses you choose must reflect the interdisciplinary nature of your program and provide a foundation for your proposed research. You should be able to select courses from regular offerings but must also include a minimum number of dissertation credits (a minimum of 18cr and a maximum of 30cr). The coursework approved by the student’s committee serves as the contractual agreement between the student and the university designating the degree requirements.

B. Regular Committee Meetings

Setting frequent, recurring meetings with your IIP Doctoral Chair (monthly is strongly recommended) and quarterly with your full Committee is a critical element to success for students pursuing this degree program. This facilitates consistent program planning, academic mentoring, and ensures rigor and deadlines are met in coursework, candidacy, and the research project. This also allows for review of proposed changes to the approved program of study and/or (re)negotiation of funding support for the student in the form of a Research Assistant or Teaching Assistant positions.

C. Registration

Given the unique and specific format of the IIP program, students are responsible for ensuring they are registering for courses which have been approved in their POS. Some research-based, dissertation, independent study, or other courses (i.e., EDU 690) may require goal statements, related forms, and approval by or registration access through an IIP student’s home department. The Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs Manager housed in the Graduate School can also assist IIP student with registering

for select courses, but it is the student's primary responsibility to register for courses required in their program of study each semester.

D. Program and/or Course Changes

As the student progresses through their program, it may be evident that new and/or alternate coursework is required to provide the necessary knowledge to conduct or complete planned research. [Program and course changes](#) to a degree program following admission approval must be formally approved by the student's committee and The Graduate School.

E. Comprehensive Exams:

The comprehensive examination will be determined by the student's doctoral committee and may consist of a written exam and/or separate oral exam. Before the end of fifth semester of the IIP program, the student must pass a comprehensive exam covering the major field(s) of study. The exam will have both written and oral components and is conducted by the IIP committee members.

The IIP student and committee must jointly decide on the type and number of questions in the written exam, who will write and grade the questions, if the questions will be short answer or open book, what constitutes a pass/fail grade, and what will be the oral component of the examination.

Written exam options can include three question types,

- **Type 1:** Questions pertaining to the dissertation topic, designed to demonstrate and strengthen the student's knowledge and consideration of the chosen IIP areas and further advance the student's research objectives and procedures.
- **Type 2:** Questions on an important and controversial area of current interest in the student's general fields, but not directly related to the dissertation topic.
- **Type 3:** Questions of historical, developmental, or philosophical importance in the student's area of specialization. These are generally short answer and closed book.

Type 1 and **Type 2** questions are long answer and open book. The committee will allow at least one week to submit completed answers to these question types. The student will have complete library access and discussion privileges and the **answers are to be prepared in a manuscript form with bibliography or literary citations. The written exam may be up to 4 questions, two each Type 1 and Type 2**

Alternatively, the committee and student may jointly decide to have the written exam be between 5 and 10 **Type 3** questions. The committee will decide on the amount of time the student can spend responding to each question.

Oral exam questions shall explore in depth the areas presented in the written questions but shall not be restricted to these questions. Oral exams may be open to the student's committee members who shall have voting privileges. Normally, the vote for passing the comprehensive exam will occur at the end of the oral examination.

The comprehensive examination is graded with either a passing or failing grade determined by a majority vote of the student's approved graduate committee.

Upon completing the exam, the student's chair must notify the IIP program manager in The Graduate School of the comprehensive exam results. This must be done within five weeks after passing the exam. The student can retake the exam one more time, i.e., two total attempts.

F. Dissertation Defense

The dissertation can draw on a variety of epistemological frameworks, including a western science approach, indigenous research methods, qualitative and quantitative methods, cultural, social, and historical scholarship, and critical analysis of creative works.

The dissertation must contain original scholarship that communicates advances in the field. Students can also include chapters on the broader impacts of their scholarship on society.

The abstract can be written in the student's language along with an English translation.

Given that much of human endeavor is collaborative, each dissertation is the result of shared work. It is the responsibility of the student to acknowledge the contribution of others. Joint authorship of chapters is possible after discussion with the student's committee.