

Interdisciplinarity

@Pratt

A summary overview

Fall 2025

Compiled and presented by
The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies



PIC student work on display
Spring 2022 | Photo by Renae Calderon Ramirez

Introduction

In the past decade (2015-2025), Pratt has conceptualized, created, and implemented a unique spectrum of interdisciplinary initiatives, programs, and projects.

The framework for “Interdisciplinarity at Pratt” is fashioned through two main spheres:

1/ The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies coordinates an integrative curricular realm—including Pratt Integrative Courses and the Customized Minor—and generates projects that support various schools and stakeholders;

2/ The decentralized ventures of departments, schools, and other units bring about inter/transdisciplinary projects and research. These constitute Interdisciplinary Clusters.

Concrete suites of actions have transformed interdisciplinarity and opportunities for inter/transdisciplinary learning and teaching at Pratt. A snapshot portrait of such endeavors—all of which directly or indirectly target student learning and success, conducted and created within the academic realm—is presented here, with summary bullet points. This is an extensive list, but not a comprehensive one, as new initiatives and efforts are always generated and put into motion.

Note: It is important to be aware of definitions and distinctions within interdisciplinary studies, as well as be conscious of the nature of disciplinary formations, transformations, and elaborations. In this pamphlet, however, we are only listing the actions and implemented initiatives. For more details, please consult our website, pratt.edu/the-center-for-interdisciplinary-studies, and other relevant material from Pratt. Also, the initiatives and projects described here have been designed and delivered over the years by a range of units and administrative staff, as well as faculty and other stakeholders. Profound gratitude to all who have been invested in, and have contributed to, the growth of interdisciplinary offerings and projects at Pratt in the last ten years.

Curriculum and Classes

- The undergraduate curriculum shift of 2015-2017 generated changes that now require students to take classes outside their departments and to take electives later in their undergraduate years by:
 - Creating consistent and standardized 3-credit classes in lieu of 2, 3, and 4-credit classes, many of which existed prior to the shift;
 - Having a standard required number of credits in all departments—48 required, and 6 possible electives;
 - Integrating into the curriculum “All-Institute Electives”—meaning, open electives, where students have to take 9 credits outside of their department.
- A new taxonomy of minors allowed the creation of many new minors—and, along with the curriculum shift, provided opportunities for students to actually be able to declare minors.
- A unique Customized Minor was created, a student-designed minor that offers students opportunities to create their own cross-departmental course of study.
- Interdepartmental/Interdisciplinary Minors (a specific type of minor), as well as School-based minors, were launched. In addition, minors that were essentially interdisciplinary in content were also created—many based in various departments within the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences (SLAS).
- Independent Study was more rigorously redefined and implemented, allowing students to create their own courses.
- The Pratt Integrative Courses (PICs) were launched in 2018, and have shown tremendous growth and popularity in the years since. There are currently 25-30 sections running every semester, with over 450 students registering regularly per term.
- Continuous innovations were undertaken in individualized studies through regular one-on-one meetings with students and theoretical framing of possible learning areas.
- Efforts to integrate research skill-building that begin in liberal arts classes and reach into studio practice were undertaken between SLAS and various leaders in the Schools, with a focus on the transfer and application of skills. These address learning outcomes within programs as well as General Education (Gen Ed) outcomes.
- School-level courses were created and, along with electives in various departments, allow students to take more varied courses through their open All-Institute Electives.

Systems and Structures

- The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies was established in 2022 after the more experimental phase of interdisciplinary initiatives had been subsumed under the Fuse Nexus umbrella—itsself an innovative framing of initial activities and projects.
- The Interdisciplinarity Framework was created: conceptualizing, organizing, and instituting our research, teaching, and practice within two main complementary spheres—The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies (TCIS, commonly dubbed The Center) and the Interdisciplinary Clusters. This framework provides a unique re-imagining of inter/transdisciplinary work within a higher education setting. Rather than have one entity organizing/owning interdisciplinarity, or even tasked with facilitating it across divisions, the framework empowers all constituencies and stakeholders while also concentrating particular efforts through TCIS. Interdisciplinarity thus happens through these fluid, flexible, and simultaneously focused and dedicated spheres.
- The inaugural position of Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary and Integrative Learning was established in the Office of the Provost in 2022. This happened subsequent to the creation of the inaugural positions of Director of Transdisciplinary Initiatives, and, later, Director of Interdisciplinary Studies.
- The Future of Interdisciplinarity at Pratt Overtures (FIPO)—undertaken in AY 22-23—consisted of presentations and conversations with many stakeholders across the Institute that allowed them to reflect on Pratt’s work in this arena, and to chart possible paths forward.
- Logistical matters connected to cross-departmental learning were identified and addressed across various divisions. These ongoing efforts continue to respond to operational challenges and obstacles, such as course availability and the ability to sign up for courses in other departments. They are often addressed through collaborations between offices and divisions, including the Office of Undergraduate Advising, the Registrar’s Office, and various offices under Student Affairs.
- Planning and conversations for space needs across departments have included issues of access to tools, shops, and emerging technologies. There are also ongoing discussions toward the reuse of various Pratt spaces with the goal of supporting a number of cross-school initiatives that generate collaboration, experimentation, and research.
- The hiring of a Director of Assessment, along with new initiatives building common practices and strategies across academic areas, has provided grounding in processes related to the assessment of learning.
- Preparation for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s accreditation of 2024 allowed various divisions to create reports and generate an overall portrait of Pratt and its operational systems.
- Since April 2024, Pratt has been a member of the United Nations Academic Impact Initiative, a network of more than 1,600 institutions in 150 countries committed to furthering the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research, teaching and learning, public engagement, campus operations, and policies all contribute to these goals.

Projects and Initiatives

- Public presentations of interdisciplinary research and practice are organized through various umbrella frameworks in The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies—from “Crossing the Lines” to “Open Circuits”—and through Schools’ lecture series. Various programs of this nature are also generated by cross-departmental groups (i.e. First-Year Conversations) as well as Pratt’s Public Programs team.
- Original and innovative (and sometimes quirky) initiatives, where faculty and various stakeholders could expand and present their research in creative ways, were developed.
- Academic orientations for new students present interdisciplinary opportunities and the integrative nature of Pratt’s undergraduate curriculum through the alignment of Foundation, General Education, and the Pratt Integrative Courses. This intentional presentation of the integrative thread allows students to see themselves as agents and designers who are makers of their own education and unique vessels of interdisciplinarity.
- Initiatives in the first year—Foundation Expanded, First-Year Conversations—prepare students in integrative thinking and the fusion of disciplines. The First-Year Conversations initiative allows continued reflection on connections across fields in the first year and beyond.
- Starting in Fall 2023 (AY 23-24), the first-year Foundation department’s schedule permanently shifted from 6-hour studio courses to 4.5-hour studio courses, allowing for coordination across first-year studios and seminars—specifically those in History of Art and Design (HAD) and Humanities and Media Studies (HMS)—and for the creation of First Year Cohorts and Living Learning Communities (LLCs).
- A common hour was created on Tuesday afternoons—spurring community-building and programming, including Foundation Cohort Exhibitions planning, and the Foundations Lab Art and Science Series.
- Hubs for interdisciplinary practice were developed, including The BookPub, Crit the Crit, and MOLI, the Mapping Outcomes and Learning Initiative.
- Collaborations with art and cultural organizations, such as the Center for Book Arts, were created to fund and sponsor residencies.
- Schools and departments regularly fund sponsored studios, lectures, forums, symposia, and other events with panels or presenters highlighting interdisciplinary research and practice.
- Various interdisciplinary clusters, such as The STEAMplant, provide opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty, students, and alumni.
- A cross-departmental and Institute-wide focus on Student Success led to interdisciplinary collaborations and the development of strategies to address topics related to student retention and graduation.
- Work by staff and faculty around internationalization through the ACE Lab identified ongoing possibilities for future initiatives that would enhance Pratt’s internationalized profile.
- Work around course-based civic engagement constitutes an effort to understand the different models of civic engagement at Pratt and to provide curricular resources and pedagogical support for faculty. It has consisted of qualitative (and some quantitative) research and has identified courses focusing in various ways and through distinct models on civic engagement. This has resulted in the launch of a toolkit, as well as events and ongoing conversations around this cross-disciplinary realm of research and practice.

Faculty Focus, Development, and Research

- Faculty mentorship programs have been designed and rolled out in phases with different faculty groups.
- A multidisciplinary cluster hire at the Institute was undertaken and a cohort of new faculty hired in AY 24-25.
- An experimental joint non-tenure track appointment between three academic areas (Foundation, HMS, PIC) for AY 24-25 allowed participating programs to think about the alignment of outcomes, as well as the integration of assignments and skills.
- A Peer Review Committee was developed for faculty teaching only Pratt Integrative Courses, allowing further faculty development along with possibilities for promotion and retention.
- A framework and blueprint for joint appointments has been developed and will be reviewed by various committees.
- Schools and departments continue to support faculty research and development in a variety of ways specific to their disciplines.
- Faculty groups and Faculty Learning Communities continue to conceive and implement projects that contribute to overall thinking about interdisciplinarity, including exhibitions, teaching/learning models, public programs and panels, and curricular work.
- Pratt Institute's Office of Research and Strategic Partnerships (ORSP) supports faculty and student research that engages ways of making for a world in need of change. ORSP facilitates research that drives new creative futures and paves the way for equitable forms of discovery and growth. Pratt faculty, staff, and students lead scholarship that deepens what we know about our world and the ways we shape it. ORSP hosts various events, including the annual Research Open House, the flagship showcase for research and design at Pratt, which features exhibits demonstrating how design can address, explore, and challenge the boundaries of discovery and innovation.
- The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), launched in 2018, continues to host workshops, events, and communities with a focus on faculty sharing best pedagogical practices. The CTL's mission is to support faculty in their teaching and pedagogical approaches within their disciplines, as well as to foster interdisciplinarity through faculty collaborations. In addition, CTL supports Faculty Learning Communities—year long meetings for collective research, writing, and sharing on various topics of pedagogical interest. CTL also publishes the journal ITERATIO, a scholarly space for research and publication with faculty across schools contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning within the art and design community.
- The Office of the Provost, with the Center for Teaching and Learning, offers New Faculty Orientation (NFO) before the beginning of each semester. NFO introduces new faculty to Pratt and its support systems. NFO also allows new faculty to get to know one another while building relationships and connections that will help them succeed in their research, teaching, and practice

Into the Future

Beyond the actions and ideas that have led to the implementation of projects and programs, future aspirations and ongoing work in the interdisciplinary realm include: re-envisioning inter/transdisciplinary infrastructure and leadership to better serve programmatic ambitions; continuing to generate opportunities for faculty development, appointments, and promotion within interdisciplinary spheres; providing capacity to create new courses and interdisciplinary studios; exploring offerings for graduate students.

Indeed, although much has been accomplished, staff, faculty, and various leaders are continuously thinking about further development and improvements within the interdisciplinary realm. New initiatives will be devised and implemented along various timelines and in alignment with the Institute's next strategic plans. We are, collectively, always aspiring to innovate, and we hope to push the boundaries of teaching, research, and practice across disciplines—and within the interdisciplinary arenas.

The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies

Amir Parsa, Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary & Integrative Learning,
New Student Orientation, Fall 2019 | Photo by Renae Calderon Ramirez

