

**Guidelines for Merit Evaluation and Criteria for Excellence in  
Interdisciplinary Scholarship in the  
Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies  
Adopted November 27, 2006**

**I. Preamble**

In 1990, Ernest Boyer published *Scholarship Reconsidered*<sup>1</sup> and suggested that we consider faculty contributions to the life of the University and to the vitality of our Society in a more nuanced way than is possible with a singular focus on traditional research outputs. Boyer notes that individuality in university mission and structure is a historical strength of the US system; but he also notes that, in the face of this diversity, we have tended to apply a single style of merit and promotion evaluation. Boyer suggests that a better process would evaluate our faculty based on a portfolio of scholarship types, which he identifies as scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching. The weights given each should reflect a balance between individual interests and institutional mission upon which there is mutual agreement.

This portfolio approach to evaluation is complemented by the idea that institutions such as ours are communities. Taking “community” as a metaphor adds another dimension to our possible evaluation structures. A community is a collection of individuals who each, ideally, contribute to the goals of the whole in ways that reflect their individual strengths and aspirations.

If we are to take Boyer’s framework as our guide, we must be clear regarding UW-Madison’s role in the broad university community (we are a research university) and regarding the role of the Nelson Institute within the University and in relationship to our peer institutions. Boyer argues that at a research university the scholarship of discovery should remain dominant. If the Nelson Institute is considered simply as a subset of a research university, this would imply that we should not stray too far from traditional evaluation criteria. However, the Nelson Institute is also an interdisciplinary environmental institute with a mission to engage in problem solving as well as knowledge building. These goals allow us to give larger-than-average weight to scholarship of integration, application and teaching. Our efforts must acknowledge the tension between the standards of the University and the standards of our Institute.

With these considerations in mind, this document sketches a structure to guide the composition of regular assessments of interdisciplinary scholarship for merit purposes. We define interdisciplinary scholarship in broad terms, recognizing that it embraces the inclusion of multiple, and in some cases, diverse disciplines. We wish to stress that we see the evaluation of interdisciplinary and disciplinary activities as parallel processes and that they are rarely mutually exclusive. We further recognize that faculty within the Nelson Institute vary in terms of their

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<sup>1</sup> Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate*. New York, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

capacities (e.g., percent time in the Institute) for commitment to both interdisciplinary and disciplinary endeavors (see Table 1). Interdisciplinary scholarship is accomplished in many modes and may include collaborative as well as individual efforts. Finally, we recognize that both processes of scholarship and their outcomes deserve recognition. The Institute Personnel Committee, in making merit assessments, will take into account these various factors.

## II. Conceptual Approach to Merit Assessment

Each year, we will ask you, as Nelson Institute Faculty<sup>2</sup>, to submit a 2 page overview in support of your merit review. This narrative should include the following elements and be framed in the context of interdisciplinary contributions, but not exclusive of disciplinary contributions (Figure 1):

Statement of your role within the Institute and disciplinary home - The Nelson Institute is a membership institute and our success depends upon each member identifying with our goals and assuming particular roles to advance those goals. This part of the assessment establishes your role with respect to the mission and needs of the Institute and that of your home, disciplinary department. This statement should include a description of your objectives and participation in each. It should also be explicit with respect to how your level of appointment in the Institute figures into your allocation of your efforts and productivity.

Self Assessment of your recent activities with respect to your individual role in the Nelson Institute and your disciplinary home- This is the traditional part of the assessment. Report activities, their success and shortcomings with respect to your interdisciplinary and disciplinary goals. This section should also include a description of why you have selected the particular mix of activities that you report. At least in part, it is likely that this mix will build on the earlier bits of the narrative that describe your role in the Institute

Assessment of the broader impacts of your role and your activities in relation to the mission of the Nelson Institute- In this final section of the assessment, you should reflect on the relationship between your individual goals and activities and the needs of the broader Nelson Institute community. Have your successes furthered the goals of the Institute? Have you supported other core values underlying the foundation of the Institute? Are there reallocations of effort that you might make that would better meet responsibilities of all Institute members and the Institute's needs?

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this document, Nelson Institute Faculty refers specifically to the faculty participating in merit or tenure evaluation in the Nelson Institute, not the Governance or Affiliate Faculty as defined in our policies and procedures.

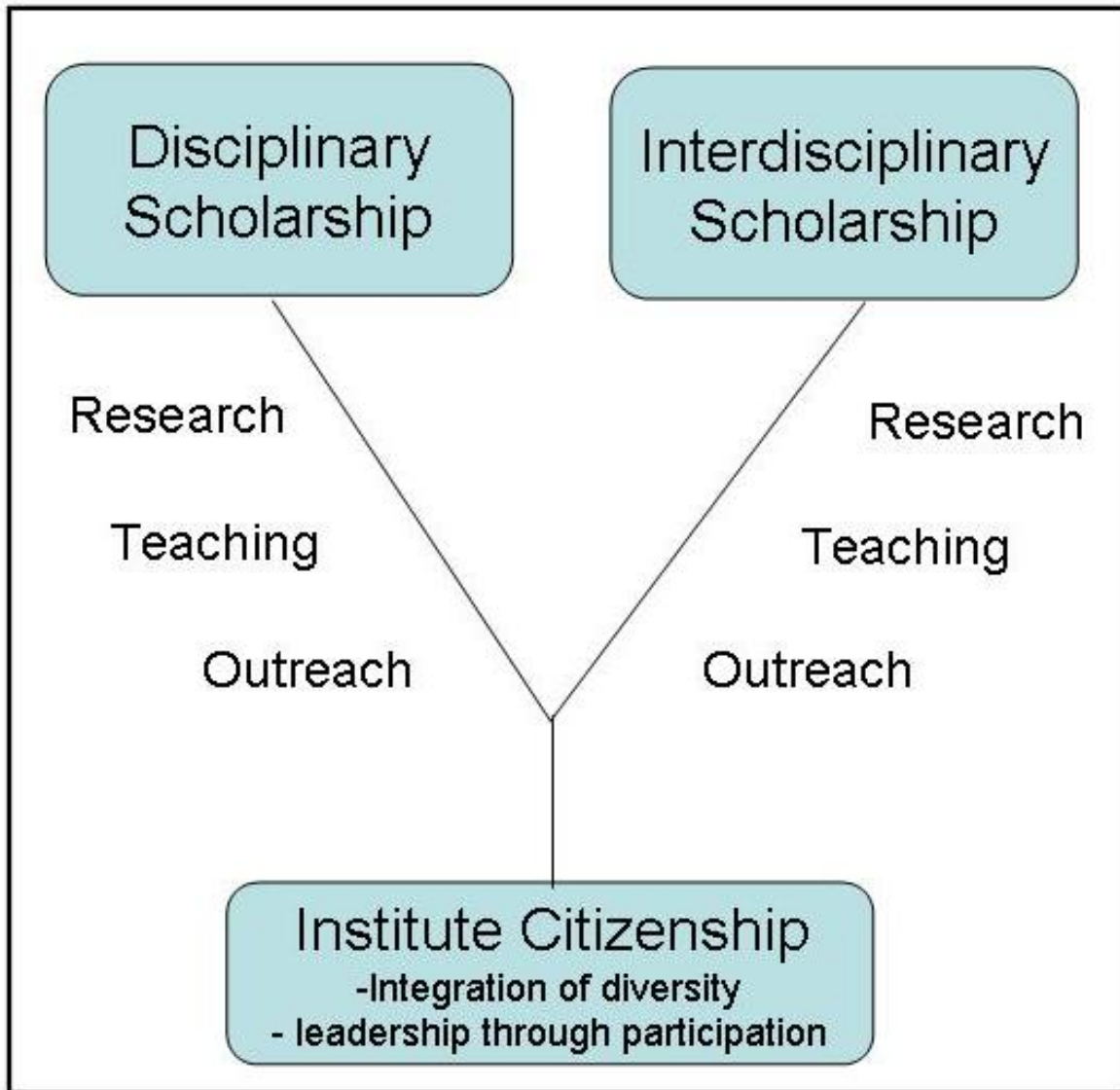


Figure 1. Conceptual approach to merit review criteria in the Nelson Institute. Individuals specify which portions of their portfolios should be reviewed in the context of interdisciplinary scholarship.

### III. Statement of Values for Self Assessment of Interdisciplinary Scholarship

The following is a guide for preparation of the self assessment report, and pertains specifically to the interdisciplinary elements of teaching, research and outreach which distinguishes that work from purely disciplinary work. Note that not all of the following criteria will apply to all individuals. The Institute anticipates that each scholar will highlight his or her accomplishments with respect to the most appropriate criteria.

## **A. Research Criteria**

### **1. Evidence of innovative individual research in an interdisciplinary context.**

Key elements include the integration of multiple related disciplines, or the integration of disciplines that transcend traditional boundaries and perspectives to address common questions. The Institute, in particular, values individual efforts to conduct environmental research that integrates among natural and physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

### **2. Evidence of engagement in building long-term interdisciplinary collaborations.**

The Institute values the collaborative efforts in which each faculty member engages. Substantial time investments are incurred to cultivate and maintain teams. These efforts may be well beyond efforts that are singular and independent of others. The Institute values faculty who integrate colleagues from a diverse suite of disciplines, host institutions or agencies into their teams and who invest in cultivating long-term research collaborations.

### **3. Evidence of attracting research support for cross-cutting activities.**

The Institute values efforts to attract research funding and other forms of support from non-traditional sources, such as private and not-for-profit organizations, international organizations and smaller scale governmental agencies as well as traditional federal funding agencies supporting novel research approaches. The Institute further recognizes that forms of support may be in the form of investments of time by team members and colleagues.

### **4. Evidence of productivity of interdisciplinary endeavors.**

The Institute values efforts to produce tangible evidence of interdisciplinary endeavors through the form of publications in interdisciplinary journals, scholarly writings in the form of monographs or books, workshops, field trips for practitioners and academics, new course offerings and outreach materials that are research-based. The Institute also values efforts that lead to the creation of interdisciplinary communities.

## **B. Teaching Criteria**

### **1. Evidence of training and mentoring students for interdisciplinary research or praxis.**

The Institute values efforts to mentor a diverse suite of undergraduate and graduate students, and provide opportunities for academic and professional growth. The professional careers of Nelson Institute students, at the M.S. level, are often very different from those of students enrolled in traditional disciplinary graduate programs. These unique career paths require faculty to attend specifically to the training required for success in an interdisciplinary context. The academic careers of Nelson Institute students at the Ph.D. level may not differ from those trained in a disciplinary program. However, faculty must help prepare students to be competitive for interdisciplinary programs, relative to other top interdisciplinary programs, and other top disciplinary programs.

### **2. Primary responsibility for teaching one or more interdisciplinary courses and evidence of integrating innovative pedagogy that is well-adapted to interdisciplinary learning.**

The Institute values efforts to creatively engage students in interdisciplinary learning. The Institute recognizes that interdisciplinary learning may be accomplished through multiple modes such as team teaching by topics in a multi-disciplinary sense, holistic treatment of material taught either as an individual or as a team, tool-based praxis (e.g., GIS), or content from emerging fields that integrate traditional fields. The Institute values efforts to incorporate novel pedagogical tools that are adapted to interdisciplinary learning and that may include the direct teaching of transdisciplinary core competencies, as well as immersion or experiential opportunities through internships.

## **C. Outreach Criteria**

### **1. Evidence of outreach through application.**

The Institute values efforts to embrace the Wisconsin Idea as a means of making the faculty powerful contributors to the development of knowledge, the application of knowledge for the edification of society, the development of wholesome human culture, and the provision of sound and substantial approaches to practical issues and problems. Applications may include innovative communications, technology transfer, and community building.

## **2. Evidence of integration into a broader body of knowledge and practice.**

The Institute values extra efforts to ensure that scholarship activities are known and understood by those able to apply it in a research, educational and community context. Recognition should be given to differential on-the-ground impacts of some outreach products from a policy and agency standpoint. Moreover, quality interdisciplinary contributions, based in empirical data and team efforts, may take more time to produce. Thus, evaluation of the strict number of products produced, without reference to the quality and impact, would be inappropriate. The Institute values outreach efforts that may be framed in terms of positive environmental and social impacts.

### **D. Institute Citizenship Criteria**

#### **1. Evidence of active engagement in efforts to integrate a diversity of perspectives into all aspects of scholarship.**

The Institute values efforts to integrate a diverse set of perspectives into research, teaching and outreach initiatives that cultivate relationships and enhance appreciation of our differences. This includes building an open context for dialogue and debate among multiple perspectives in a research context, the classroom, as well as in committees and through outreach activity. The capacity to both increase diversity of viewpoints and find the means to integrate them is central to the Institute's mission. Thus, diversity from the Institute's perspective, extends well beyond traditional measures based on race, ethnicity, gender and gender-identity, socio-economic status, or other commonly defined boundaries.

#### **2. Evidence of leadership to the Institute through participation in building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary for the Institute to accomplish its mission.**

The Institute, because it is an umbrella organization, values the contributions of all of our faculty and staff in carrying out administrative work and efforts to provide leadership through committee leadership and membership. The Institute values the unique strengths held by individual faculty. It encourages faculty to involve themselves to the degree to which these strengths are enhanced and embraced as a means of supporting the Institute mission.

**Table 1. Examples of portfolio mixes and appropriate evaluation approaches**

<b>Case 1</b>	<b>A faculty member has only 10% of her or his time in the Institute.</b>
	In comparison to someone with 100% of her or his salary or tenure home in the Institute, this member should be deemed excellent if 10% of her or his research, teaching and outreach productivity meets the criteria listed above. While this will be hard to do in a mechanistic way, the Personnel Committee should be encouraged to rank such individuals highly if the 10% threshold is met.
<b>Case 2</b>	<b>A faculty member feels that their work is both disciplinary and interdisciplinary regardless of the percent appointment.</b>
	Each faculty member should designate their accomplishments that they believe meet disciplinary and interdisciplinary criteria. If all or most of the work meets both, this should be indicated. A faculty member would be deemed excellent if her or his work meets interdisciplinary criteria while at the same time meeting disciplinary criteria.
<b>Case 3</b>	<b>Research scientists whose appointments are fully in the Nelson Institute but do not receive salary from Institute funds.</b>
	Members in this category should be evaluated primarily on the contributions they make to their particular research center. All such centers are fully housed in the Institute and therefore have missions aligned with the goals of the Institute, yet each center has a somewhat different focus. Within this approach, the criteria for evaluating scientists will be similar to those described for tenure-track faculty, but relatively more weight will be given to the research component, minimal consideration to teaching (although student advising should be recognized), comparable value to outreach, and smaller weight to service (because research scientists are not receiving salary from NI funds). Under this evaluation system, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship would be valued to the extent that such work advances the mission of the research center and, by extension, the goals of the Institute.