

## ABSTRACT: 2018 ELAM Institutional Action Project

**Project Title:** Bridges to Health and Wellness: Developing Infrastructure to Support Interdisciplinary Scholarship to Address Social Determinants of Health

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**Topic Category:** Research

**Background, Significance of project:** Sixty percent of premature deaths in The United States are attributable to social determinants of health (the behavioral, social, political, cultural, and economic elements of human life that impact human health). Interdisciplinary research is key to addressing social determinants of health. To appropriately understand and effectively improve social determinants of health, it is essential to move beyond the scope of traditional biomedical science and capitalize on the wealth of expertise, experience, and perspectives from other schools and disciplines including the humanities, law, computer science/engineering, and business.

**Purpose/Objectives:** To develop infrastructure to support interdisciplinary collaborative research it is essential to address the following key questions: a) what is the most effective and sustainable form and function for this project; b) what current infrastructure or resources exist which could either serve as a model or provide scaffolding for this project; c) who are the key working team members and decision makers who will build and sustain the project; d) what are expected and desired outcomes, and e) what motivations will incentivize collaborative work without threatening other types of academic productivity?

**Methods/Approach/Evaluation Strategy:** We have begun addressing these questions by 1) examining other models of interdisciplinary health research centers/programs that exist or are being developed at other institutions; 2) identifying strategies, challenges, and concerns from current Pitt centers and offices working to foster interdisciplinary missions, and 3) identifying interested and motivated faculty and students through interdisciplinary conferences. We also intend to use key informant interviews, group discussions, and surveys to determine needs and expected outcomes regarding interdisciplinary collaborations. Ultimately, we intend to design sustainable institutional support needed to encourage, support, and reward interdisciplinary scholarship at the University of Pittsburgh.

**Outcomes/Results:** Key challenges for fostering interdisciplinary work identified are: 1) funding, 2) sustained interest/commitment, 3) disciplinary/cultural/philosophical differences, and 4) identifying and prioritizing markers for success. Key strategies for success include: 1) ensuring frequent and open communication; 2) clear and shared understanding of expectations, roles, and goals of each member; 3) preemptive discussions regarding how to best frame/present work and outcomes; 4) fostering openness among members to divergent and even conflicting perspectives/approaches. This project builds upon work of our own interdisciplinary team. For the past three years, our team has organized inter-disciplinary conferences beginning with the 2016 Humanities in Health conference, then the 2017 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Conference, and the upcoming 2018 the Cross-disciplinary Conference on Family and Healthy U. Through these conferences, we have identified faculty and student interest in interdisciplinary research and scholarship focusing on health. We analyzed registration data from the Humanities in Health Conference: 32 abstracts were submitted in response to our call for abstracts; 30 abstracts were presented; 170 individuals registered for the conference; and 150 attended.

**Discussion/Conclusion with Statement of Impact/Potential Impact:** We anticipate that the overall outcome will be the development of an institutional culture and infrastructure that actively seeks, supports, and celebrates faculty and scholars pursuing interdisciplinary work in social determinants of health and wellness.