The term “interdisciplinary” is frequently used in institutional and academic discourse at the University of Minnesota and elsewhere. There are diverse meanings attributed to the term, and no single definition of interdisciplinary adequately captures all of the ways the term is used. As a consequence, various understandings of the meaning of “interdisciplinarity” too often create obstacles to the shared goal of enhancing and encouraging interdisciplinary graduate education. Interdisciplinarity is best viewed as multidimensional, involving a variety of motivations, ideals, and outcomes. The purpose of this document is not to seek a theory of interdisciplinarity or to attempt to evaluate and synthesize the many and not always consistent uses of the term. The intention is to provide a common template to serve as a tool to navigate and set guidelines relevant to graduate education.

The following three dimensions provide a provisional framework for identifying interdisciplinarity as it manifests itself in one or more of these broad domains and takes on different forms. The goal is not to classify interdisciplinarity into three different types but to underscore that assessing interdisciplinary activities and experiences (e.g., research, teaching, scholarship) should involve considering whether and how the features of those activities and experiences touch on these three dimensions.

I. **Intellectual and Conceptual:** disciplinary domains defined by a particular way of thinking or methodology (e.g., philosophical, mathematical) or particular topical terrains that are united through agreements or some type of consensus about how to pursue them (e.g., sociology to the extent that it is united by methods; clinical as opposed to cognitive psychology to the extent that the difference is rooted in approaches). This includes disciplines bound by an agreement to focus on a single conceptualized object (e.g., art in Art History, elements for Chemistry, the brain for Neuroscience).

II. **Institutional and Professional:** disciplinary domains formed primarily through institutional and professional agreements. Departments of Anthropology, for example, are conceptually organized around the study of humans but are typically configured around “four pillars”: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. Crossing these pillars can be conceptually interdisciplinary even though it is professionally disciplinary. There are also examples of disciplinary communities whose interactions are mediated by the professional arrangements of a discipline and the institutional (intercollegiate) relationships characteristic of the University (e.g., Economics in CLA and Applied Economics in CFANS where there are intellectual and conceptual differences between these departments but also clear, shared topical terrain). Finally, within colleges, representatives with some common interests are often organized into separate departments (e.g., Art and Art History within CLA), and departments often serve as the home for more than one professional discipline (e.g., Mathematics and Financial Mathematics in the School of Mathematics).

III. **Functional and Pragmatic:** disciplinary domains defined by the intended outcome or purpose of the research, teaching, or problem solving activity. The difference between applied and theoretical disciplines is one major indicator of this dimension: those who seek theoretical or conceptual outcomes and research products as goals often differ from those who seek concrete
results or tangible changes through their work. We should not attempt to use the Functional and the Pragmatic to define an isolated and pure community of scholars and teachers at the University of Minnesota. Instead, the goals or purpose of disciplinary or interdisciplinary research cut across institutional and professional boundaries (sometimes in unexpected ways) and often represent amalgams of methodologies or topical terrains.

Drawing on a flexible, multidimensional framework to characterize the dimensions of interdisciplinarity at the University may help is to achieve the following goals, among others:

- Ensure that any measurements made with respect to the term clearly articulate the nature of disciplinary representation, intention, and value attributed.
- Separate the characterization of interdisciplinary from the administration of interdisciplinary activities, while facilitating shared responsibilities and resources for all partners (e.g., via memoranda of understanding).
- Review and make recommendations concerning obstacles to interdisciplinary teaching (e.g. co-teaching, tuition models, course designators).
- Identify and empower key leaders to support the administration and promotion of interdisciplinary education.
- Supplement and modify the characterization of interdisciplinarity in order to identify opportunities for new interdisciplinary programs or opportunities that respond to critical societal needs and student demand without compromising support for existing interdisciplinary programs.
- Use the characterization of interdisciplinarity to explicitly address the tenure home location for faculty at the time of hiring for those engaged in interdisciplinary activities.
- Develop prototype language at the University level related to interdisciplinary work that can be added to college 7.12 statements.
- Develop promotion and tenure guidance and programming to help faculty be strategic in positioning their interdisciplinary work for internal and external review.