The Power of Interdisciplinary Degrees: Higher Ed for Foxes

Interdisciplinary Studies Centre

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Higher Ed for Foxes

1. What are interdisciplinary degrees?
2. Which students love them?
3. Four major approaches to pedagogy.
4. Why does interdisciplinary study fit well with the most effective approaches to pedagogy?
5. How does interdisciplinary study furnish students with important skills for work and life?
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Example: **PPE** – Philosophy, Politics, & Economics

The degree that “rules Britain”

Why?

Because the world doesn’t have disciplines—it has problems.

And no problems can be solved by a single discipline.

So you need flexible people who can think across disciplines.
Take the COVID Crisis
Take the COVID Crisis

1. Morally Defensible (philosophy)
2. Politically Acceptable (politics)
3. Economically Feasible (economics)
Our Approach

In our **TEACHING** and **RESEARCH** we tackle real-world problems that require interdisciplinary solutions.
Real-World Problems
What do these problems have in common?

They will only be solved by big-picture thinking that draws on the best methods and ideas from a variety of disciplines.
What disciplines do we need to address the climate crisis?

Way More than PPE!
MANY MORE!

METEOROLOGY

BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE

HISTORY

ANTHROPOLOGY

ACTIVISM

LITERATURE

THE ARTS
This is not new.
The Liberal Arts

*Liber* = free.

Liberal Arts – what you need to know to be a free individual.

Combination of Humanities and Sciences

**Animating Idea:**

- The task of the university is to prepare people to understand the world around them and to contribute to civil society as a free individual.

Dominant mode of education in Europe from 1088-1800.
What happened to education in the 19th Century?
A modern economy needs workers with specialized training.

**Animating Idea:**
- The task of the university is to prepare people to sell their specialised skills on the labour market.
The Typical Degree in the UK

Three years studying mostly one thing, with access to faculty from one department.
That’s great if that’s your thing.

But what if you’re interested in a lot of things and you want access to more faculty members?
What happens at the end of your first year if you realise you don’t like studying x, y, or z?
So: you have a lot flexibility to pursue your interests.

And make all kinds of interesting connections!
Access to Modules and Instructors Across the Entire Humanities and Social Science Faculties
Questions?
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Isaiah Berlin, “The Hedgehog & the Fox”
Isaiah Berlin, “The Hedgehog & the Fox”

Archilochus

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”
Isaiah Berlin, “The Hedgehog & the Fox”

Relate everything they learn to “a single central vision”

Seize upon a “vast variety of experiences and objects” without assuming a “unitary vision”.
The Typical Degree in the UK
1. Problem-oriented.

2. Curious.

3. Prone to boredom.
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Learning?

- Scenario-Based
- Problem-Based
- Guide on the Side
- Sage on the Stage
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Real-World Problems

American Studies

American Studies

Is Democracy Dying?

A Global Report

FAKE NEWS

FAKE NEWS
Real-World Problems

- American Studies
- Liberal Arts
- Global Studies
- Social Change
- European Studies
Focusing on Real-World Problems

1. Activates the mind.
2. Engages students in what they most care about.
3. Inspires them to make connections across disciplines.
4. Inspires them to make connections between problems.
CS200 | Social Entrepreneurs, Sustainability and Community Action

Requires students to generate small-scale projects or organisations that relate to the real-world needs of local communities, people and the environment.

Projects take a wide-range of forms.
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Common Misconception

Everyone goes to university for career-specific training.

False. Most people do jobs that they learn to do on-the-job.

Why go to Uni?
Top Ten Skills in 2020 – According to the World Economic Forum

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment
8. Negotiation
9. Cognitive Flexibility
10. Service Orientation
1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment
8. Negotiation
9. Cognitive Flexibility
10. Service Orientation
Real-World Problems

American Studies
Liberal Arts
Global Studies
Social Change
European Studies

University of Essex
1) Study complex problems that demand these skills.

2) Move across the rules of different disciplines.

3) Make connections between problems and across disciplines.

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. Interpersonal Skills
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment
8. Negotiation
9. Cognitive Flexibility
10. Service Orientation
Student Voice

Education Manager at Slooh

*Slooh* is a robotic telescope service that can be viewed live through a web browser.
1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. Interpersonal Skills
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment
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9. Cognitive Flexibility
10. Service Orientation
Past and Present ISC students speak about their experience of studying with us.

NB: interdisciplinarity and love.

More about ISC careers.
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BA Liberal Arts

BA Global Studies

BA American Studies

BA Social Change

European studies
Europe: the question of our age.
Questions?
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Thank you for your time and attention!

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