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Abstract

This qualitative study examines two US interdisciplinary graduate programs which involve faculty and students from different disciplines. Haworth and Conrad's engagement theory of quality graduate education was applied. It was found that when interdisciplinary programs facilitate engagement by supporting diversity, participation, connections, and interactive teaching and learning, students report positive experiences. Engagement is particularly achievable when an interdisciplinary administrative unit (e.g., a school or center) grants degrees and serves as a tenure home for faculty. Students earning degrees in traditional departments had more difficulty connecting interdisciplinary requirements to their disciplinary work, and were often faced with incompatible program requirements or advice from faculty members. Although they desire to do interdisciplinary work, the students and faculty in traditional departments are required to meet additional and often conflicting requirements. Engagement may further be complicated because these participants feel divided between collaborations, social networks, and expectations that pull them in different directions. (HRK /

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