

Oversight for Interdisciplinary Distinctions

An Interdisciplinary Distinction incorporates a curated, synergistic combination of activities for a student's growth and an interdisciplinary curriculum. Students participate in a sequence of courses that are then blended with experiential, co-curricular activities outside the classroom. In this way, students learn to translate their knowledge into practical applications and are prepared to communicate these experiences to a broad audience. A distinction typically requires 6-9 credit hours combined with a complementary series of high-impact practices that range from novice to advanced engagement and may include internships, service-learning activities, undergraduate research, workshops, and study abroad/away experiences. Finally, students complete the distinction through a capstone experience that serves as the culmination of their curricular and co-curricular learning.

This micro-credential is collectively developed and managed by the Associate Vice Provost for Inclusive Excellence in Education and the Advisory Committee of an academic unit (in consultation with the Program Coordinator of Outside the Classroom Curriculum and the Associate University Registrar) to ensure the academic and experiential integrity of student learning outcomes. This document provides a top-level overview of shared responsibilities when proposing new distinctions and/or supporting student completion of existing distinctions.

Proposals for New Interdisciplinary Distinctions

New Distinctions should help students explore “real-world” challenges or opportunities beyond what is possible through majors, minors, or certificates because they require exposure to and engagement with a variety of disciplines, courses, and experiences beyond what is offered via a singular academic unit. To that end, Interdisciplinary Distinctions should be accessible to all undergraduate students on the Pittsburgh campus. So, all elements of the credential (curricular, co-curricular, high-impact practices, capstone) should be available to students regardless of home department or school without additional financial burden (or with availability of scholarships where necessary). The credential should be comprised of the following components: curricular work, co-curricular activities, high-impact practices, a capstone experience, and artifacts of student participation. Students wanting to earn a Distinction must fulfill specific requirements in each category.

Proposals should include the following components:

- Proposed name for the Distinction.
- Background and primary motivations for creating the Distinction.
- Identification of the Distinction's project lead and advisory committee
- Names of faculty and staff involved in developing and supporting student completion (across OTP, Pitt OCC, and academic unit).
- Coursework to be completed by students within the Distinction (typically 6-9 credits of courses on regular rotation). Rarely should the creation of a Distinction require the development of new courses.
- High-impact, co-curricular activities to be completed by students within the Distinction, outlining specific hours of effort, numbers of activities, etc. This should be crafted in consultation with Student Affairs experts in the Outside the Classroom Curriculum (Pitt OCC).

- Explanation of student learning outcomes and measures for success.
- Explanation of OCC competency use or partnership (if applicable and after consulting with Pitt OCC)
- Explanation of how the Academic Advisement Report (AAR) within PeopleSoft will be utilized for tracking student progress and completion/graduation certification of the Distinction (after consultation with the Office of the Registrar and Office of the Provost)
- Identification of students' capstone task or assignment to reflect upon their experiences within the Distinction and plan for equipping students with the vocabulary to articulate the value of the experience
- Process and timelines for students to declare their intention to pursue the Distinction
- Support resources in place for tracking student progress and completion of the Distinction
- Communications plan to promote student engagement with the Distinction
- Two (2) letters of support for the Distinction, one to represent the curricular coursework support and one to represent the outside-the-classroom support. Letters of support should acknowledge the committal of resources (staffing, scholarships, etc...) needed to sustain the Distinction.

The process for developing, approving, and implementing a new Distinction is as follows:

1. Advisory committee (comprised of faculty content experts and staff with advising responsibilities; convened by academic unit hosting the micro-credential) consults with the Associate Vice Provost for Inclusive Excellence in Education (AVPIEE) to formulate Distinction milestones and requirements, as outlined above
2. Advisory committee consults with Pitt OCC to partner with OCC/Suitable Dashboard
3. Advisory committee submits Distinction proposal to the AVPIEE
4. AVPIEE reviews proposal and consults with University Registrar regarding course requirements and AAR
5. AVPIEE hosts pre-approval consultation with the advisory committee and Associate Dean(s) of hosting academic unit(s)
6. AVPIEE may request further development of advisory committee before submitting final proposal to VPUS
7. Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies (VPUS) reviews/ approves Distinction
8. Office of the Provost mobilizes implementation alongside the advisory committee, including consulting with Registrar on building of AAR requirements and Distinction milestones within PeopleSoft, and systems integrations in Suitable for progress and completion tracking
9. Any changes to approved name, components, and/or overall structure of Distinction will require additional review by AVPIEE and approval by VPUS.

Maintaining Existing Interdisciplinary Distinctions and Supporting Student Completion

Students should successfully complete a Distinction as part of their existing courseload; additional time to degree should not be required of students completing one or more Distinctions. To ensure student success, the AVPIEE will remain the point of contact for administrative support and consult on new and existing Interdisciplinary Distinctions. The following units will regularly provide support in the following areas:

Registrar

- Consult with AVPIEE and advisory committee during development phase
- Review all course offerings as tied to curricular requirements for this credential
- Support use of course attributes to properly identify courses that fulfill curricular requirements
- Create PS plan code
- Build Academic Advising Report (AAR) to ensure students and advisors can track progress via Pathways and Suitable platforms
- Provide training and support to the administrator(s) responsible for overseeing graduation clearances, managing the completion process, and handling distinction discontinuation when necessary.

Pitt OCC

- Consult with AVPIEE and advisory committee during development phase
- Review and identify potential co-curricular pathways to complement curricular requirements
- Provide necessary data to OTP Student Success Team when building new Distinction
- Advertise, recruit student enrollment in Distinction

Academic Unit Project Lead

- Create application/declaration form in Qualtrics and implement enrollment process
- Advertise, recruit and support student enrollment in Distinction
- Regularly educate and update faculty/staff on the Distinction
- Identify staff who will support students as they progress through curricular, co-curricular, experiential, and capstone components. This includes regular communications with students, monitoring enrollment/matriculation record; maintaining student record in PeopleSoft; removing students who would like to be discontinued from program
- Update course offerings that may fulfill curricular requirements
- Identify and support administrator(s) with primary responsibility for graduation clearances and certification process
- Finance academic unit's access to Suitable platform
- Attend quarterly strategy and assessment meetings with AVPIEE

OTP Undergraduate Studies Team and Suitable

- Coordinate automatic matriculation process; establish co-curricular requirements via host dashboard or create new on Suitable
- Manage relationship with Suitable to build tracking platform for Distinction
- Coordinate development of marketing and communications plan and materials
- Train project lead and designated administrators on Suitable, PeopleSoft and Pathways
- Ongoing support for improvements or needs regarding the operational elements of the Distinction via online platforms