

I Am (an Interdisciplinary)

Katelyn Kortright

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Dr. Lindsay Zeig, Ed.D, LPC, NCC, SCL

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Interdisciplinary studies is a little understood path to follow, and can be hard to explain. The main point of being interdisciplinary is to integrate skills from multiple disciplines, or fields of study, in order to create a wholly unique experience for a specific goal. The National Academies cite the inherent complexity of nature and society as one of the four powerful drivers of interdisciplinary research (Augsburg, 2016). I see this first hand as I go through adulthood, my educational journey, and my career. I am always applying information I have learned in one area of life to others.

I started my college career off studying graphic design. I took a traditional route instead of an interdisciplinary approach to my studies and my coursework was completely focused on design. This actually proved to be a disadvantage to me as I began my career and noticed I did not possess the skill sets I would need as a freelance designer such as writing contracts or accounting. I had to learn a lot of the interdisciplinary skills I needed on the fly.

When I decided to leave the design field and pursue a new career in the medical field, I was more prepared to decide how I wanted my education to look. I already possessed a lot of soft skills such as communication and time management. I put these to use from the beginning to make sure my education was going to work for me instead of me working for it. I wanted to apply everything I had to move toward the specific goal of applying to a Master's program in Occupational Therapy.

To this end I chose courses that I knew I would need and make me a good candidate for whatever might be required in this new career. I started off by taking all the courses I needed to gain a basic understanding of the human body and science. Then I started adding on courses that would not traditionally fall under pre-medical study, but would be infinitely useful as a practicing physician. I took several psychology courses so I could better understand patients' conditions and alter care to their specific needs.

One course I took that was not the traditional track for Occupational Therapy was a course about health care systems in the US and around the world. I was able to apply this

course not only to my studies, but also to my personal life and navigating my own health care. “Integrative learning occurs when students make a connection between class readings in sociology and their own situations” (Augsburg, 2016, p. 20). This is exactly what I was able to do by creating an integrated course plan. Another opportunity choosing an integrated plan offered me was to make my general education courses applicable to my chosen field as well. As an occupational therapist, I will encounter patients with varying levels of disability. Because of this, I chose to take a sign language course to fulfill my language requirement and learn the skills I would need to communicate with someone who does not have the ability to speak or hear, a situation more likely to occur in a field like occupational therapy where disabilities are the primary source of need for care.

Because I was able to create an integrated plan specific to my goal of becoming an occupational therapist, I will be graduating a full year earlier than my previous course plan would allow. I have been able to take an undiluted course load, focusing only on what I need to be the most successful I can in my path. And best of all, it is unique to me. No one will ever have the exact educational experience I did, and that makes me a stand out candidate.

References

Augsburg, Tanya (2016). *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*.
Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.