Binghamton University’s Transdisciplinary Areas of Excellence (TAEs)
Frequently Asked Questions
Fall 2013

**Why did Binghamton University create five Transdisciplinary Areas of Excellence (TAEs)?**

The TAEs are designed to enhance our strength as a research university. Binghamton University is investing in research — as well as undergraduate and graduate education — by hiring 150 new tenure track faculty between 2012 and 2016. By investing heavily in five areas in which the University currently has significant strength, we will build the critical mass necessary to achieve distinction. We will also create rich intellectual communities that will nurture faculty members’ scholarly work, promote collaboration, and bring faculty from a variety of disciplines together to examine critical issues.

**How were the TAEs created?**

They were developed by a committee of faculty appointed by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Provost. This committee identified five broad areas of scholarly inquiry that are socially, culturally, intellectually, scientifically, and technologically significant. It believed that these areas raise challenging questions that can be answered best by faculty from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. The areas are transdisciplinary because they will bring together faculty with different disciplinary perspectives to explore an important issue.

**Are faculty hired through this initiative expected to have transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary research agendas?**

Above all, we seek scholarly excellence in the candidates we recruit. We welcome faculty whose research is open to crossing disciplinary boundaries and employs transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches. At the same time, we recognize that scholars whose research agendas reflect the methodologies and intellectual approaches of their disciplines can make valuable contributions to the TAEs. Irrespective of their scholarly approach, candidates hired as part of a TAE are expected to have a research agenda that fully engages the theme of the TAE. They are also expected to work with faculty colleagues associated with their TAE in a variety of venues such as workshops or symposia. While they will continue to develop their own research agenda, they should also be open to developing joint grant proposals with others, where appropriate. Because faculty members’ research interests change over time, individuals hired as part of a TAE may pursue research that is not aligned with the theme of their TAE.

**How do the Transdisciplinary Areas of Excellence change the tenure and promotion process?**

They don’t. Faculty hired as part of this initiative will have a tenure home in a department and will be considered for promotion and tenure according to their department’s standards. Recommendations for reappointment and tenure/promotion are made by the faculty member’s department and are subsequently reviewed by the school dean.
University Personnel Committee, provost, and president, just as in other cases. Faculty who are part of a TAE may request a statement of support from their steering committee or members of the area with whom they have worked closely. They are not required to do so, however.

**What is the role of the TAE steering committees in the hiring process?**

Each of the TAEs is guided by a steering committee made up of 12-16 faculty members. Two steering committee members will join three or more faculty members from the hiring department on search committees for TAE positions. Faculty designated by steering committees will participate fully in the activities, deliberations, and decisions of the search committees. When candidates visit campus, most of their time will be spent with faculty and students in the department. However, they will also meet with members of the TAE steering committee who will discuss with them the activities of the TAE and the candidate’s potential contributions to it. TAE steering committees will provide feedback to the hiring department and also to the dean of that department’s college or school. This process will also have the benefit of exposing the candidate to a broader swath of the campus than might otherwise be the case.

**What are the advantages of participating in a TAE?**

The TAEs offer an opportunity for faculty to expand their intellectual community beyond their home departments. As part of a TAE, faculty will join a community of scholars drawn from a wide range of disciplines that is interested in a common topic. TAEs offer members the opportunity to participate in symposia and workshops, build research collaborations, and gain access to resources to support their intellectual work.

**What is the time commitment expected of faculty hired into a TAE?**

There is no obligation for faculty who are hired as part of a TAE to serve on the steering committee or assume service responsibilities for the TAE. All faculty may participate in workshops, symposia, and other programs developed by a TAE steering committee. They may also apply for grants made available by the TAEs to support interdisciplinary faculty collaboration. While some of the current members of the steering committees will leave their committee at the end of the year and other faculty will be named to take their place, service on the steering committees has been and will remain voluntary. We view the TAEs as magnets to bring together faculty who share common intellectual interests. By doing so, we will expand faculty members’ intellectual communities and promote collaborations that will strengthen research and teaching.

**How can current BU faculty participate in one of the TAE’s?**

All current Binghamton University faculty are eligible to participate in any of the five TAE’s. Appointment to a TAE steering committee is made by the provost. Some current members of the steering committees will leave their committee at the end of the year, and other faculty will be invited to take their place. All faculty may take part in workshops, symposia,
and other programs developed by the TAE steering committees. They may also apply for grants made available by the TAEs to support interdisciplinary faculty collaboration. Ultimately, the TAE’s are a forum to engage faculty who share common intellectual interests and a magnet for new ideas, which can strengthen both research and teaching in any of the five areas.