This memorandum outlines my ideas for a transdisciplinary “Master of Innovation” program to be administered by the Graduate School and Provost’s office in response for your call for proposals for innovation in graduate education. The requirements from your request for proposals demand brevity. I therefore consolidated many of my thoughts into bullet points. If you, or any member of your team, would like clarification on any of these items, do not hesitate to contact me at any moment during your selection process or afterward. I am committed to the success of these ideas and look forward to your feedback.

Description of the initiative proposed

“Traditional” students comprise the student bodies of today’s universities. Increasingly, however, universities are finding they will need to market and deliver educational products to life-long learners. As knowledge workers, students will no longer be content to learn and practice in discipline-specific environments. Future students will increasingly demand personalized education that meets their individual human potential development needs. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge transfer and production are critical for the success of individuals and organizations in an economic reality that is increasingly demanding of innovation. As a large “Research I” university, the University of Minnesota must strategically position itself to leverage its knowledge capital toward the development of innovative, new knowledge production.

I propose that the Graduate School, in coordination with the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, create a Coordinating Office for Transdisciplinary Programs. The office, reporting to both the Graduate School and Provost, will administer a transdisciplinary, master’s level program that will enable students to maximize their individual, innovative knowledge production potential.

Because successful completion of the proposed program is dependent on the individual student’s personal leadership, admittance to the program will be competitive and dependent on the prospective student’s demonstrated history of leadership as well as intellectual achievements. Prospective students accepted into the program are required to select two co-advisors from two different academic departments for their designed field of study. If the advisors concur that an existing program could meet the student’s needs, the student would be required to instead apply for or transfer to the existing program. If no developed field of knowledge presently exists, the student, in consultation of the

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1 This is a suggested title, and may need to be changed in the future to avoid confusion with the existing Innovation Studies program.
faculty advisors and Graduate School will develop a customized academic program, combining core coursework from the relevant contributing fields in addition to elective coursework of the student’s choosing.

At the end of the program, the student will submit (and defend) either a professionally-relevant portfolio of work completed (Plan B) or a Plan A thesis. Following the successful defense, the Graduate School will award the student a “Master of Innovation” in the field of their creation (e.g., “Master of Innovation in Educational Business Design”).

Audience that will benefit from this proposal

The audience that will benefit from this proposal involves all stakeholders and actors that are involved in innovative production in the emerging knowledge economy. These individuals and organizations include (and are not limited to):

- Present and future knowledge workers and innovators
- Traditional and non-traditional students
- University faculty and staff
- Businesses
- Governments (local, state and national)
- Non-governmental organizations

Expected impact

The intended outcome of the proposed program specifically meets the Graduate School’s goals to a) innovate in the design of graduate education to produce excellent student experiences and outcomes; and, b) develop institutional policies and practices that facilitate interdisciplinary teaching, research, and training in graduate education. By focusing on individual knowledge production, the program also complements the Graduate School’s diversity initiatives. Additional outcomes include:

- Demonstrate that the Graduate School and the University of Minnesota are leaders in innovation-based education.
- Produce professionals that are leaders in the innovative fields they create.
- Create new value networks and knowledge networks within and beyond the University.
- Contribute to the continued socioeconomic growth of the State of Minnesota through innovative research and education.

Steps needed to implement the new initiative

Please see “proposed project timeline,” below.

Evaluation criteria

Products generated from the implementation of this proposal are intangibles and are therefore difficult to quantitatively evaluate. As part of the program’s operation, a supervisory committee will need to be formed to determine criteria for evaluation, evaluate the program and provide recommendations for improvement. Long term evaluation criteria should include:

- Change of University and Graduate School ranking in international surveys.
• Amount and quality of innovative knowledge and innovative application of knowledge produced within University.
• Impact on socioeconomic development in Minnesota, nation and world.

Implementation partners
Implementation partners in the formation of a coordinating office would span University-wide leadership and will include the active collaboration of:
• Graduate School
• College deans
• Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs & Provost

Estimated cost of implementation
The most significant initial development costs would be from several FTE adds to Graduate School staff: Director of Transdisciplinary Programs, marketing coordinator/specialist, and support staff. Additional funds will need to be budgeted to cover overhead operating expenses and an initial marketing budget. Program costs may be recovered through student enrollment fees. Through new industry-university collaborations, operating costs could be further reduced, and transform the program into a profit center.

Proposed project timeline
An ambitious timeline for this project is proposed:
• Now - Fall 2006: develop finalized implementation plan, hire staff for Coordinating Office
• Fall 2006: Open Coordinating Office for Transdisciplinary Programs reporting to the SVP for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School
• 2006-2007 school year: begin program development for colleges and faculty, begin nationwide publicity and marketing efforts
• 2007-2008 school year: pilot program with up to fifteen students to develop best practices in the program, identify problems that may emerge, and provide effective corrections
• 2008-2009 school year: program operates at full capacity

Prognosis
The creation of a truly transdisciplinary graduate program will propel the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota into a leader of knowledge production and innovation in the global economy. The focus on each individual student’s interests and potential will produce more positive student experiences and provide a framework to support active, responsive knowledge production and distribution from underrepresented groups. This model will help the University become one of the top three research universities in the world in the next decade and beyond.