

Each year on the Friday before the Annual Meeting, the Academic Relations Committee of the AAR facilitates a workshop designed for academic leaders — department chairs, deans, administrators, and faculty — involved with or interested in departmental, curricular, or institutional responsibilities. “Cultivating Interdisciplinarity: Opportunities for Curriculum, Faculty Development, and Hiring,” was the 2010 topic addressed by over thirty-five participants and presenters. The theme was the second year of a three-year sequence addressing the implications of the 2008 Teagle Foundation/AAR sponsored White Paper [The Religion Major and Liberal Education](#)

. The workshop examined the convergence of interdisciplinary opportunities that are emerging within religious studies and theological education and the pressures departments sometimes feel to think about curriculum and hiring in ways that enable larger institutional outcomes beyond those of the religious studies department.

The challenges and possibilities inherent in interdisciplinarity were on display both in keynote speaker Richard M. Carp’s presentation and his persona. Carp, chair of interdisciplinary studies at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, has lived the value of interdisciplinarity in his academic career, bringing together religious studies with theater, visual arts, anthropology, and cognitive science as well as university administration. Carp carefully distinguished key terms:

- Multidisciplinarity — using various disciplines to examine an issue, without integrating the disciplines’ approaches;
- Interdisciplinarity — where the disciplines are integrated; and
- Transdisciplinarity — either in the sense of a system of thought applied widely within many disciplines, or examining phenomena — such as “peace” or perhaps “religion” — that confound disciplinary boundaries.

Carp also presented a bibliography, highlighting the most significant and useful works and their particular insights.

A morning and an afternoon panel followed Carp’s lead of integrating conceptual understanding with lived experience. The morning panel emphasized opportunities for curriculum, faculty development, and hiring, followed by an afternoon panel on resources and programs. Panelists

from different institutional contexts addressed how different institutional missions and environments both complicate and open up opportunities for addressing the concerns of departments and faculty. Panelists stressed support of new faculty hires, working positively with administration, and making the best use of available resources. Panelists included:

- Joseph Favazza, Stonehill College
- Nami Kim, Spelman College, on behalf of Rosetta Ross, Spelman College
- Carolyn Medine Jones, University of Georgia
- Rebecca Todd Peters, Elon University
- Steve Young, McHenry County College

Each panel was followed by breakout sessions in which the panelists joined participants in small group discussions and brainstorming.

“This workshop was timely because we as a discipline can no longer have solely internal discussions about curriculum and hiring in our current climate in higher education. We must look at institutional strategic plans and needs of students; departments have to be strategic in ways that don’t water down what a new hire brings to the department, but can be more interdisciplinary and address broader institutional goals and objectives,” said Fred Glennon, outgoing chair of the Academic Relations Committee.

The Academic Relations Committee plans on following up this engaging workshop with a third wo