Reviewer's report

Title: Jack-of-all-trades, master of none: Postgraduate perspectives on interdisciplinary health research in Australia

Version: 1  Date: 3 January 2007

Reviewer: Robyn McDermott

Reviewer's report:

General
This short essay is from two PhD students who assert that they "have no intellectual home" due to the interdisciplinary nature of their chosen fields of research. There is a useful overview of previous commentaries, especially noting the difference between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, and the relative difficulty pursuing the latter in a formal "traditional" PhD program. It would be useful to see some examples of these difficulties, perhaps arising from their own work, including how the research paradigms from each discipline conflict in certain contexts, and possible concur, and how this challenge can be met creatively. Especially in the domains of public health, medicine and anthropology, there are sound examples of excellent synthesis of the different approaches which can produce new insights for each discipline.

It is uncertain what this paper adds to the debate, other than reiterating the general observation that interdisciplinary research is hard. I would like to see some discussion about what measures the authors have taken to resolve particular issues, and whether these difficulties are generic, or perhaps particular to some institutions or individuals. eg. does the university or department have a policy of encouraging interdisciplinary work, and if so, how does it operate, how effective is it and what measures might we apply to gauging success?

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

A framework for approaching this problem would help, together with some examples of the particular paradigms which come from each discipline, how strong these are, in what contexts they might conflict and whether they always need resolution.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

The quotation at the beginning of the paper should have the full source rather than just the reference number.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Offer publication in BMC Public Health after minor essential revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.