

**Title**

Aligning Boundary Objects in SES teaching and scholarship: Leveraging the liberal arts model for local and global sustainability.

**Designated workshop liaison**

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**Rationale**

Interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship are needed to address complex problems in social-ecological systems (SES) and achieve a safe and just space for humanity. Concepts and competencies of SES have historically been addressed individually from overlapping disciplines. These disciplines, despite similar desired outcomes, have varied lexicons and unique academic outputs and support systems. Similarly, departments and majors (both traditional and new) within liberal arts institutions (e.g., Biology, Environmental Studies, Sustainability Science) share a gradient of attributes informed by perspectives that overlap but may not align. Solutions in SES require that the range of skills and approaches manifest in liberal arts colleges converge.

However, aligning interdisciplinary teams for classes and scholarly endeavors presents a significant challenge. To overcome this challenge, Pennington et al. (2016) proposed a focus on providing spaces and processes for the co-creation of boundary negotiating objects that can bring disparate perspectives together toward a shared understanding, leading to collaborative action. This effort can surface concepts and terms used by communities in ways that constrain that ability to work across disciplines. For example, in our own conversations the terms “values”, “model”, and “nature” have independently emerged as objects of which each discipline has theories, data collection methods, and norms that intersect but do not overlap. This iterative process supports a passion for, and fosters increased capacity to engage in collaborative work, but at the same time respects the disciplinary depth of peers.

As faculty and students increasingly move along these gradients and work with different individuals and institutions, it is essential that we frame and prepare for teaching and scholarship with boundary objects that may be interpreted differently. At liberal arts schools in particular, SES scholarship parallels teaching and engages the student body throughout. This poses unique challenges to training future scholars that may lack a strong grounding in a discipline while concurrently engaging with or across other disciplines.

**Audience**

This workshop targets faculty who participate in interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship around social-ecological systems in the humanities and natural and social sciences.

### **Schedule and format**

This Spring 2019 workshop will explore the above challenges and identify what faculty are doing along disciplinary SES and LAC gradients, find solutions for stronger and more transparent collaboration, and establish a network of interdisciplinary SES scholars across AALAC institutions.

- Workshop Activities:
  - Introductory framing
  - Presentations of teaching and scholarship by participants
  - Discussion-based explorations of shared and unique successes and challenges experienced
  - Writing sessions to prepare manuscript on interdisciplinary SES scholarship in the liberal arts and a SESYNC Pursuit grant

### **Goals, impact, follow-up activities**

- Short-term impact: creation of a community of scholars in interdisciplinary SES teaching and scholarship
- Immediate impacts: full draft of a manuscript on Boundary Objects in the Liberal Arts for Ecology and Society for external peers
- Near-term follow-up activity: a draft proposal for [SESYNC Pursuit or Workshop grant](#) on how LAC are uniquely positioned to lead SES scholarship and teaching to submit late spring 2019
- Long-term activities: collaborative research, shared teaching innovations, conference presentations

**Plans for the evaluation of the workshop:** A Qualtrics evaluation form will be sent out before and after the session to assess how perceptions and attitudes about boundary objects changed. Faculty will make formal commitments to take back lessons learned to their university to implement with peers and administrators, including a letter to their Dean, Provost, or President sharing the experience.