

Department of Social Sciences The Future of the Field/Disciplines

NOTE: The faculty in Social Sciences come from 6 different disciplines, each of which has a unique development trajectory. What follows focuses on our interdisciplinary program, rather than patterns within individual academic fields..

Directions in the Social Sciences

General

Increasing attention is already being given to **geographic information systems (GIS)** across the fields that make up the social sciences. Early steps toward enabling students to acquire familiarity and experience with GIS tools in principle and in practice would give MTU graduates an advantage over their peers. Clearly, building this capacity involves numerous units on campus, especially the schools of Technology and Forest Resources and Environmental Science. Similar importance should be placed on **knowledge and familiarity with a global economy** – meaning that a Department whose research is focused exclusively on the U.S. and the West needs to be broadened. This matters most directly to the teacher education program in the social sciences, where greater attention must be given to **world history and non-western cultures**.

Environmental Policy:

The environmental policy field is increasingly recognized as critical to solving several of the most important problems faced by society, including materials recycling, global climate change, sustainable energy development and transportation, and water scarcity. The most effective (and therefore most marketable) people in this field will possess **highly interdisciplinary training, thinking, and experience**. MTU should accelerate collaboration between all disciplines bearing on this growing field. The time seems right to propose an interdisciplinary Ph.D. degree in Environmental Science and Policy housed in Department of Social Sciences and supported by the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering with participation from the School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science; the Departments of Biology, Geological and Mining Engineering and Sciences, and Chemical Engineering; the School of Business and Economics, the Center for Water and Society; and the Sustainable Futures Institute.

Industrial Archaeology and Heritage

This program is poised to assume genuine international leadership as international activities in heritage conservation, interpretation, and tourism expand to encompass more industrial heritage sites. Two things should help cement this opportunity in place. First, we need to **institutionalize our international presence** by securing opportunities for exchanges of faculty and students and joint research endeavors with colleagues and institutions in Europe and elsewhere. Second, we have to **develop and institutionalize connections to non-university partners in the area of heritage management** in order to better serve graduates seeking non-academic positions. Partners include non-university units such as the Forest Service and National Park Service, as well as other agencies and institutions that operate on an international level.