



Navigating Interdisciplinary Pathways: Cultivating Versatility and Readiness to Contribute for Early-Career Researchers

1 Introduction

- Early-career researchers (ECRs) can be often asked to contribute across disciplines before consolidating their own disciplinary identity.
- My journey as an ECR in Applied Linguistics has been shaped by teaching and mentoring in Computer Science, Chemistry, and Medical Education, as well as contributing to projects in AI in higher education, mental health, and gender inclusivity.
- Interdisciplinarity can offer both opportunity and precarity (Abidin, 2019).
- Building interdisciplinary capacity requires supportive structures (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2018).

2 Challenges Encountered as an Interdisciplinary ECR

Balancing breadth with depth

- Teaching and mentoring in multiple departments while completing a PhD in Applied Linguistics.
- Risk of losing focus in core discipline.

Negotiating scholarly identity

- Moving between Applied Linguistics, Computer Science, and Medicine sometimes left me perceived as an ‘outsider’ in each.

Institutional pressure & precarity

- Short-term contracts demanded constant adaptation across roles, with little long-term recognition.

Translating across epistemologies

- From conversation analysis to AI ethics to medical case discussions → constant re-learning of disciplinary ‘languages’.

Supporting others while vulnerable

- Researching experiences of female academics facing inequity and wellbeing challenges while also navigating my own early-career vulnerabilities.

4 Implications for Research Culture

- Recognise interdisciplinarity as expertise → not a detour, but valuable scholarship.
- Provide stability → longer contracts and clearer career pathways.
- Mentorship & networks → structured support for navigating multiple fields.
- Inclusive practices → address gender, race, and caring responsibilities.
- Reward teaching versatility → value contributions that cross disciplinary boundaries.

My journey shows that interdisciplinarity, while challenging, is a training ground for adaptability, resilience, and leadership. Research culture that recognises and supports ECR versatility will help cultivate confident, future-ready scholars.

3 Turning Challenges into Skills

Challenge	Adaptation / Skill developed	Impact
Balancing breadth & depth	Time management; protecting disciplinary identity while branching out	Sustained PhD focus while contributing to 4 other departments
Negotiating identity	Reflexivity; positioning myself as a ‘bridge-builder’	Recognised as adaptable contributor across disciplines
Precarity & short-term contracts	Resilience; rapid adaptation	Maintained high-quality teaching & mentoring despite instability
Translating epistemologies	Communication versatility; methodological flexibility	Produced outputs from AI ethics report to CBL facilitation
Supporting vulnerable groups	Empathy & inclusive mentoring	Policy briefs, micro-films, and mentoring for WP students & female academics

[1] Abidin, C. (2019). Navigating interdisciplinarity as a precarious early career researcher. *Cultural Studies Review*, 25(2), 78-83.

[2] Jaeger-Erben, M., Kramm, J., Sonnberger, M., Völker, C., Albert, C., Graf, A., ... & Winzer, J. (2018). Building capacities for transdisciplinary research: Challenges and recommendations for early-career researchers. *GAIA-Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, 27(4), 379-386.