Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: The Case of the Honors Interdisciplinary Studies Major

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Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Design your Own Major

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Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Student-Customized Major

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Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Student-Designed Major

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Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries: Do-it-yourself Major

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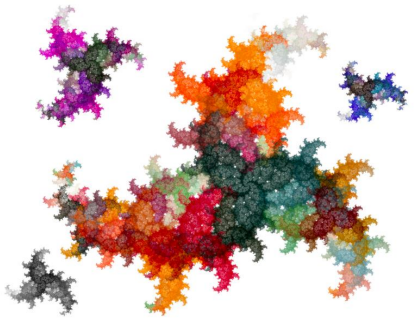
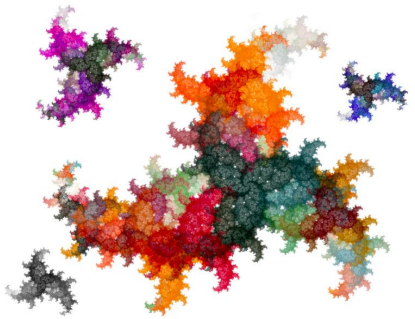
Rationale



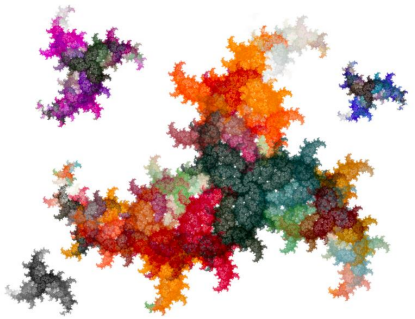
- Empower students to learn to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge and methods across disciplines.
- Overcome limitations of disciplinary "boundaries." Note: Revolves around a theme, which promotes building of connections between disciplines and across the curriculum (for students and faculty). Helps colleges get involved in large scale problem solving

Rationale



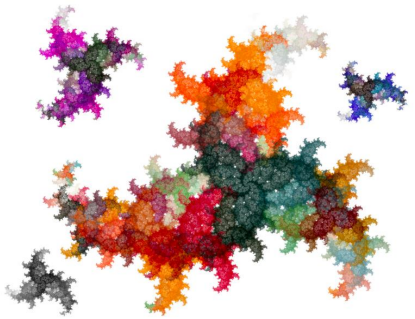
- Promote students to take control over their learning, develop a connection with, and ownership of, their curriculum
- Increase student engagement with their chosen field of study
- Feed passion and passionate people
- Facilitate students develop and demonstrate initiative and perseverance, increasing marketability

Rationale



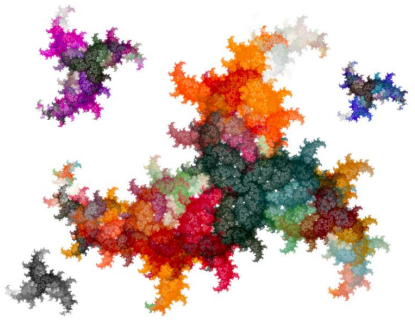
- Better addresses needs of students in emerging fields
- Better addresses the needs of a special group of students
- Develop more idea entrepreneurs
- Recruitment. It helps with students looking for something different or with students looking for something traditional, but not offered at their university of choice
- Retention

The Process



- Not easy and very engaged, for both student and faculty advisor – student will not go through it if the idea is to “find” an easier way to get a degree.

The Requirements



- The proposals, developed by the students in collaboration with their major and secondary professors, need to include the following:
- 1) a program of study
  - The program of study should include all the requirements of the degree (type) chosen by the student (AB, BS, BSA, BSFCS)
  - At least eighteen semester credit hours of “major” core curriculum, thirty semester credit hours of upper-level “major” electives from three different departments
  - A capstone thesis or project to integrate all of the course work.

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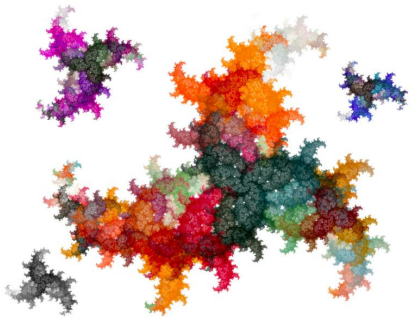

2. The learning objectives, purpose, and central focus of the program
3. An explanation of the academic rationale, intellectual cohesiveness, and rigor of the program of study
4. A justification why the student needs to create a new major rather than use a combination of existing majors, minors, and certificates.
5. Both Faculty and Student collaborate in the whole process. A third faculty member also approves the program of study, “reads the thesis” and approves curriculum.

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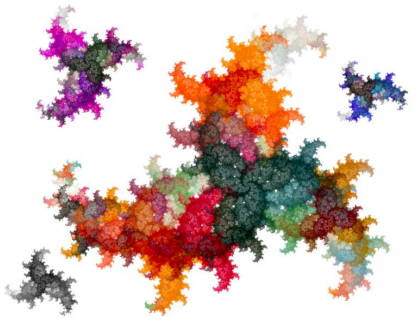

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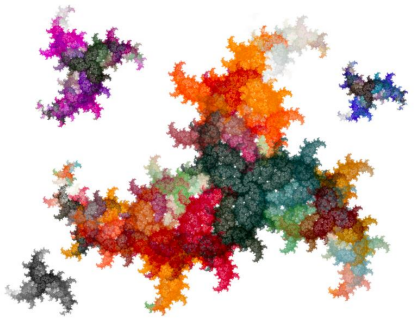
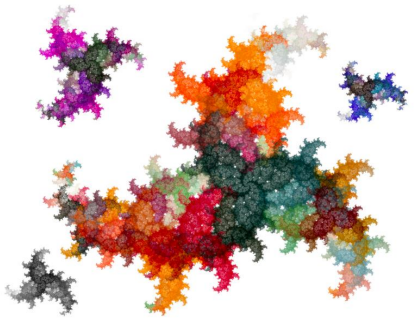


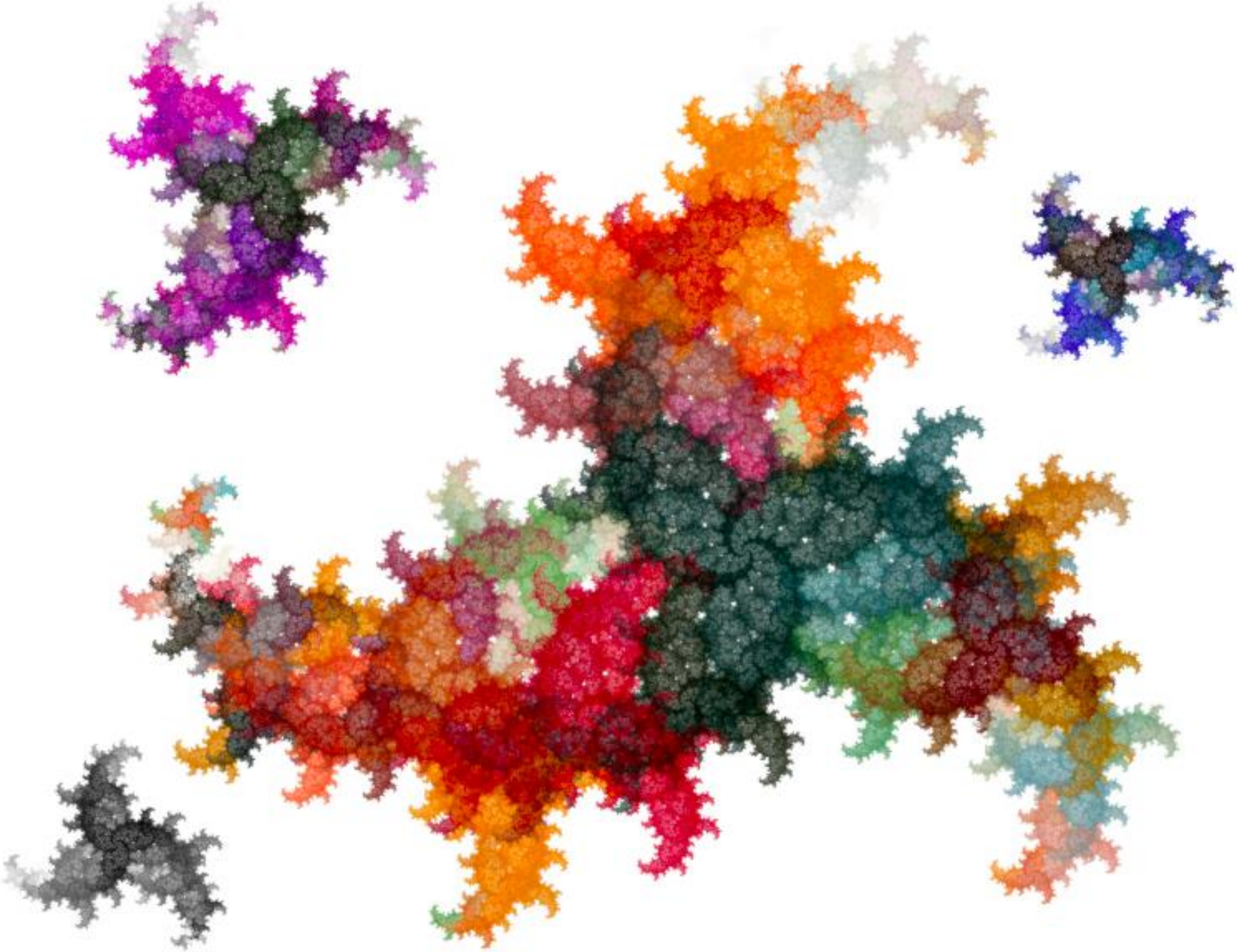
10. A review committee evaluates it

11. My students: Have another major

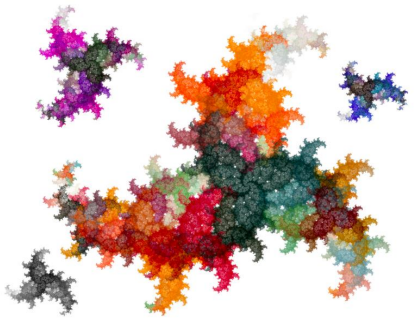
The Limitations



- Time consuming for both student and faculty member
- Perception
- Changing directions
- Need to actively maintain rigor
- Fear of the unknown

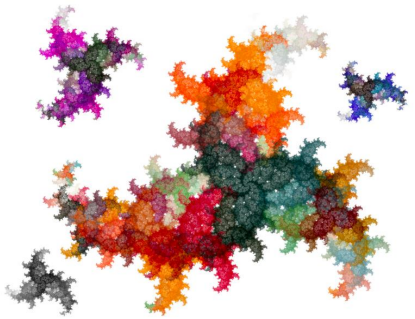


Sarah



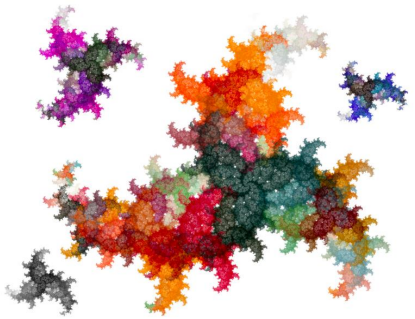
- Migration and development studies
  - Came to UGA from High School with 64 credits.
  - 6 months in a refugee camp in Jordan – worked in adult education programs
  - 6 months in a California law firm working with all types of immigrants from a legal perspective
  - Detroit – Catholic services working with Middle Eastern Refugees
  - Migrant ag workers and prepared extension workers agents

Sarah

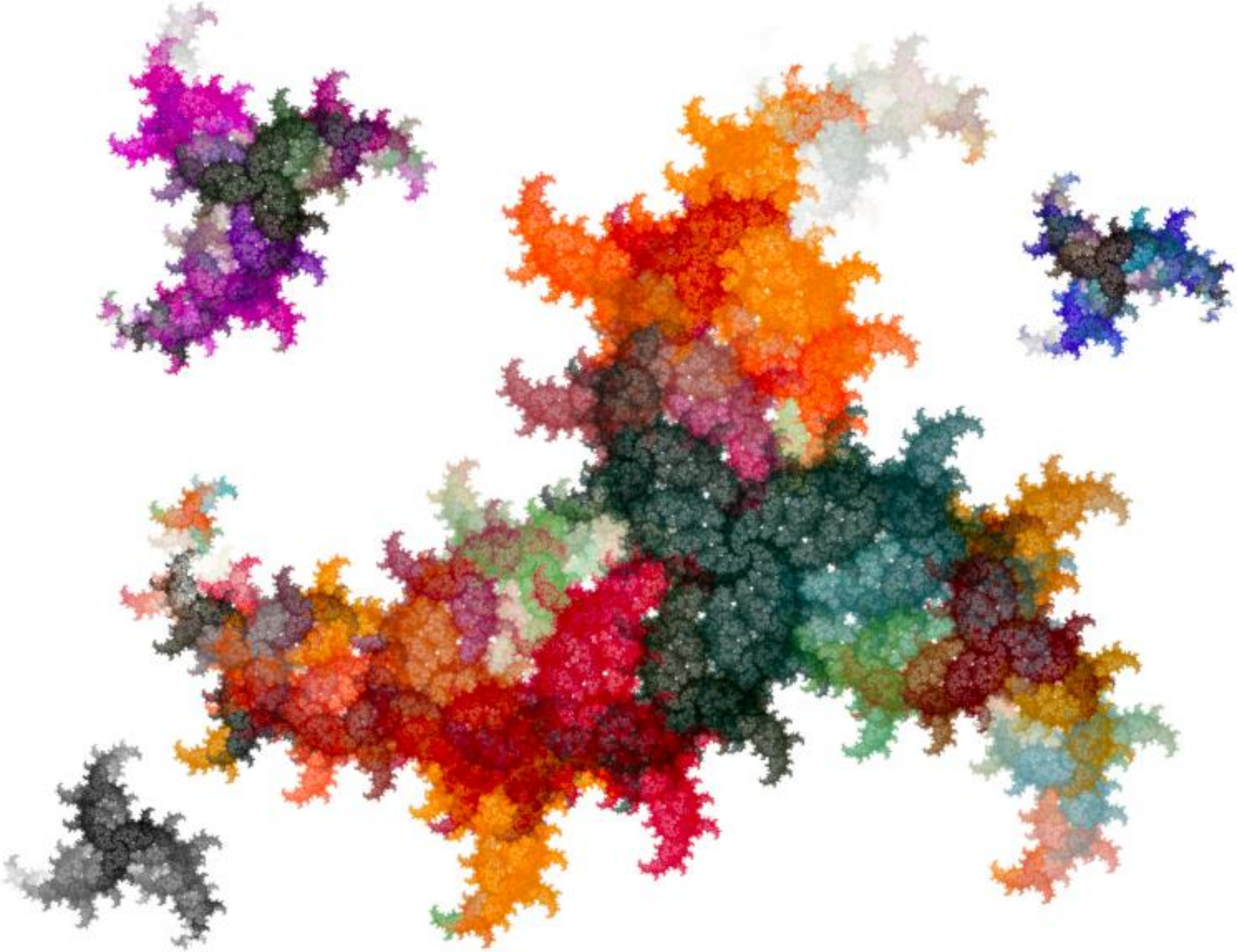


- Dangers: Too much breadth, not too much depth? – not a problem for Sarah.
- Had Arabic and Spanish majors, and a pre-law major
- Most advanced. Her two last years mostly took graduate level courses

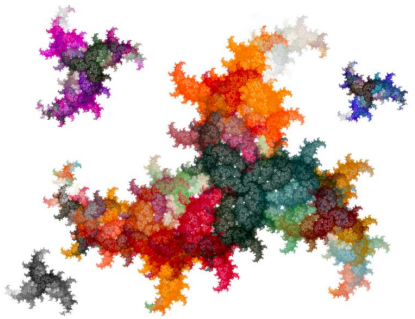
More examples



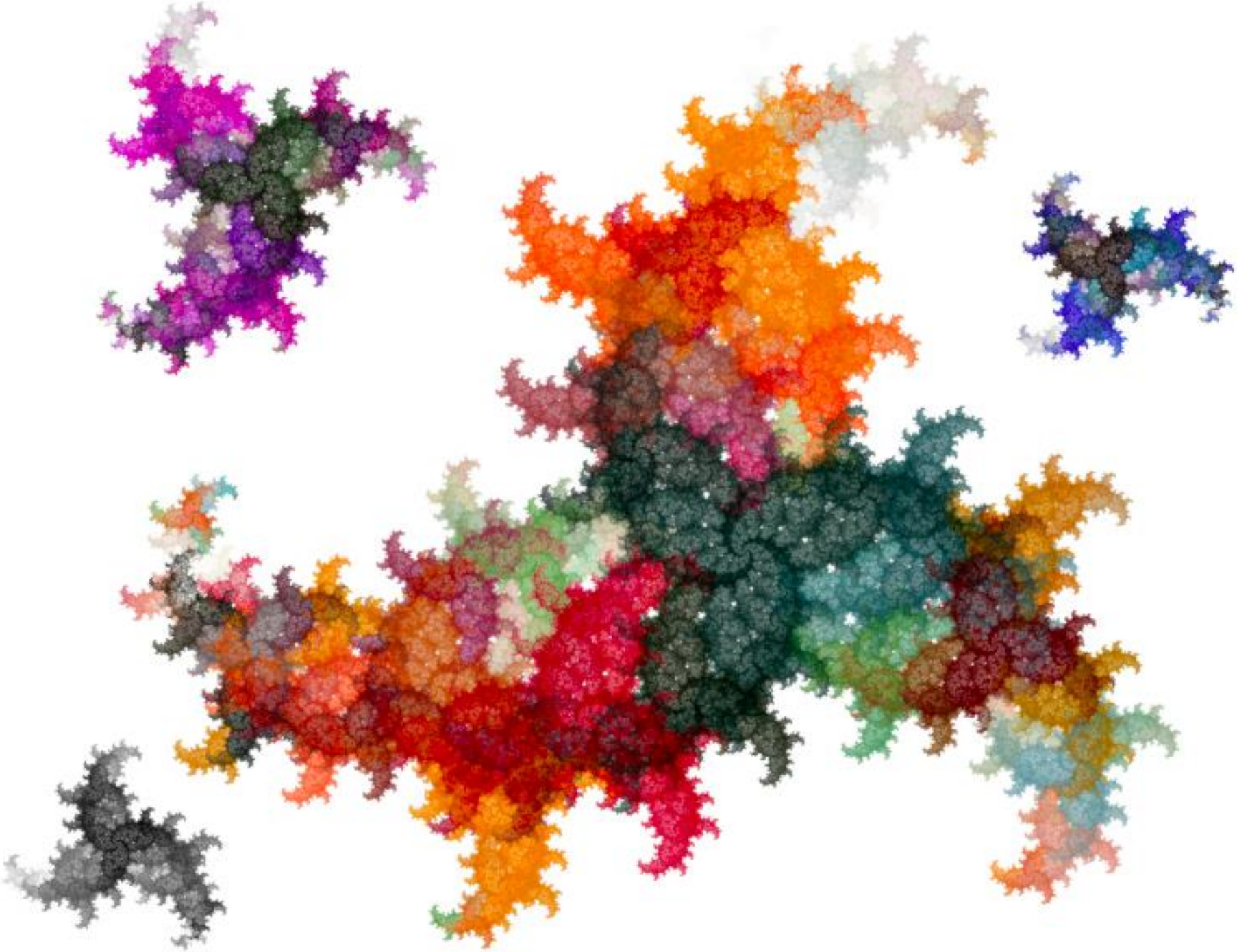
- Anna
  - Agricultural Education
  - International agriculture
  - Honduras
- Laura
  - Food science
  - International development and international nutrition
- Rosa
  - Latin American and the Caribbean studies Major
  - Spanish Major, Portuguese minor
  - Ecology
  - Social development and sustainable Agriculture
  - Boren scholarship – Paid for about 1 year in Brazil, also went to Colombia, Ecuador and more



Sarah



- I still remember the day Sarah introduced herself to my class: I had never witnessed an undergraduate student articulate and synthesize career goals with the clarity and conviction that Sarah did. Since that day, Sarah has never ceased to continuously amaze me. By creating her own Honors Interdisciplinary Studies major, Sarah has been able to study migration and development. I have enjoyed seeing her put together the multidisciplinary pieces of a complex real-world puzzle that only people like Sarah can solve. Throughout the years, she has proven to be a courageous, caring, and outstanding change agent with no barriers or limitations: She has created and excelled in a challenging academic program, and has worked around the world in several organizations with different roles and responsibilities that have helped her better understand, analyze, and evaluate the breadth and depth of migration and development issues and problems.



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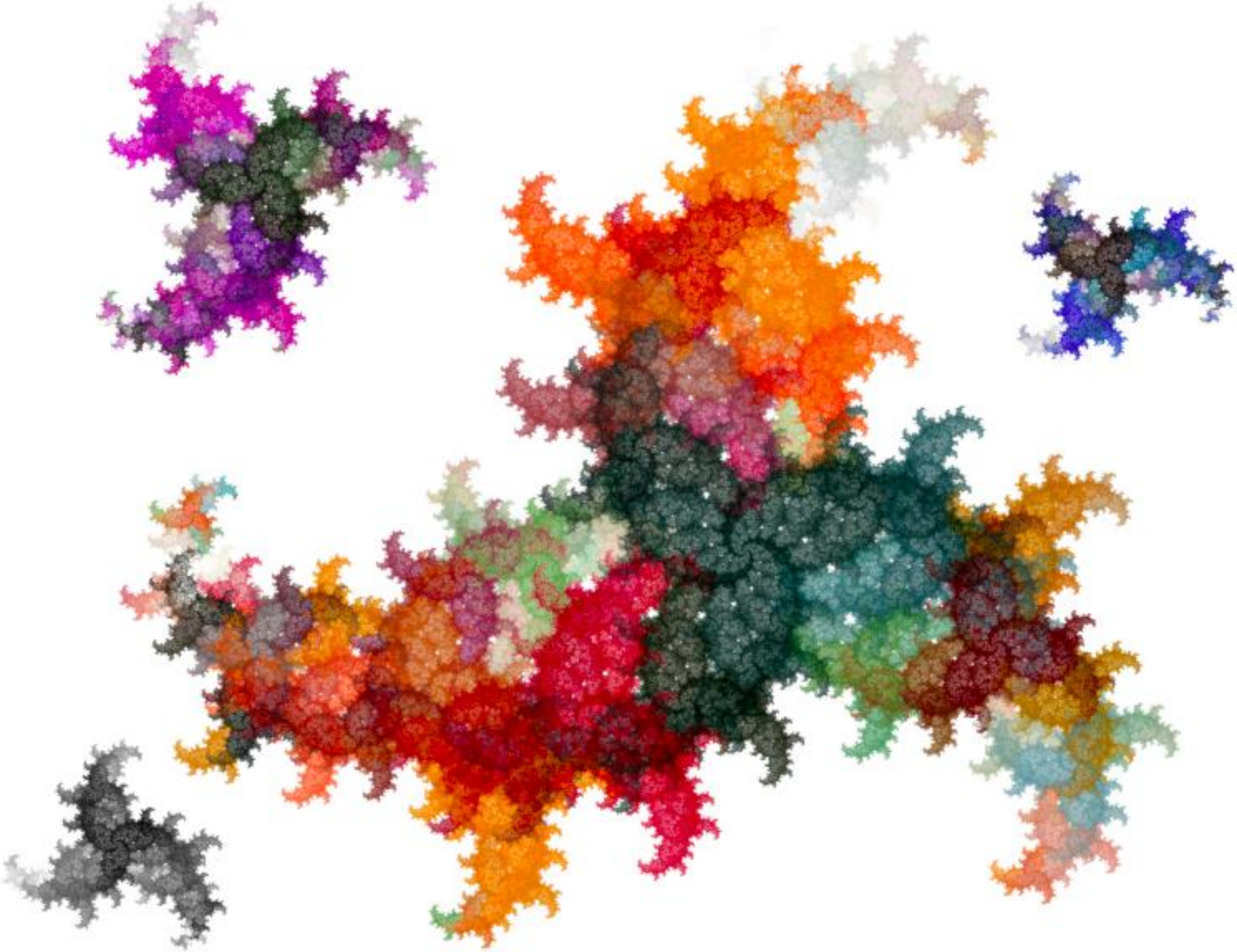
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