Integrative course design

There is no one right way—and likely no linear way—to go about negotiating and designing linked courses together with a colleague. Here are a few thoughts to get you started. Please share back with the Integrative Studies chair and Advisory Committee any insights or processes that you find work for you, so we can pass them on.

Consider how you might begin to explore or chart the points of intersection for your courses:

In all cases, it’s a good idea to review the Integrative Studies goals and outcomes before beginning your explorations with a potential dyad partner in order to ground your discussions in the key concerns of the curriculum. Here are two possible points of departure:

1. **Core concept.** It is probably easiest to start with a shared point of interest, question, theme, core concept and to explore from what perspectives your disciplines contribute to understanding it, what questions your disciplines would ask of it. (e.g. perhaps you and a colleague are interested in water as a critical natural resource—one of you from the perspective of Ecology and one of you from the perspective of Economics)

2. **Disciplinary perspectives.** On the other hand, you could start by considering key disciplinary concerns and assumptions in an effort to determine fruitful topics for exploration from different perspectives. (e.g. perhaps you identify that your discipline—say, English, in your area of specialization—values the kinds of questions raised by critical theory; your colleague in Political Science is also compelled by similar questions or interested in exploring work of the same theorist who interests you. What topic or core concept that resonates with the Integrative Studies curriculum might provide fertile ground for explorations in both English and Political Science from the perspective of critical theory?)

Consider why and in what ways you might ask students to integrate across courses and disciplines:

- To compare and contrast what different disciplines bring to the same area of concern?
- To reach a larger synthesis, a greater level of insight or understanding by intentionally investigating a theme or core concept in multiple ways?
- To teach process as well as theory?
- To invite different disciplinary assumptions to confront one another?
- To provide opportunities for deep, rich, complex experiences and understandings?
Consider how students will experience integration:

In part, the success of an integrative approach depends on the explicit messages students understand about our goals for linking courses. How can you invite students to keep the integrative, relational goal mind? The following list provides some possibilities, but is by no means exhaustive.

- Use the syllabus and assignments to clarify and communicate your goals for the kinds of connections you invite students to make
- Identify readings or other texts, works, or artifacts that both courses explore through different lenses
- Engage students in parallel or joint assignments or exercises that either invite them to take different perspectives and approaches from different disciplinary bases or that require them to draw on insights and methods from both disciplines to answer a key question or solve an important problem
- Ask students to engage in structured, critical reflection about what each course contributes to their understanding of the shared theme or core concept—and what value they may find in approaching a theme or concept from multiple perspectives

Consider what kinds of assignments or approaches to teaching might lend themselves especially well to integrative inquiry:

Explore assignments, teaching strategies, or overarching pedagogies that encourage students to engage in exploration, inquiry, comparison, contrast, and synthesis—in relation to the core concept and your disciplines. Three examples of many possibilities:

- **Jigsaws** (a collaborative learning assignment that asks students to read different relevant texts that they bring to bear in answering a shared question—for more specifics, contact the CTL)
- **Service learning** (the synthesis students engage in making meaning between experience and classroom learning—particularly if multiple perspectives come to bear on one theme—can be powerful—for guidance, contact the Center for Community Engagement)
- **Problem-based learning, inquiry-guided learning, team-based learning** (these approaches begin with a problem and require that student teams engage in structured inquiry or problem-solving to bring disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives to bear on solving it—for more information, contact the CTL and the Center for Community Engagement)

The suggestions on this handout are just a series of points of departure. If you’d like to explore any one of them more with a bit more guidance or company, please don’t hesitate to contact Sarah Fatherly or Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens.