

Designing Integrated Learning for Students

Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education

This exercise explores possibilities for integrating student learning on your campus with the aim of discovering what is *doable*. After setting the groundwork for collaboration, from what matters most to us as educators to our expectations for student learning, we work with you and at least one other partner—using courses currently taught—to create enriched learning opportunities for students enrolled in two or more classes. From designing a shared activity/assignment to a capstone project, the emphasis is on how to work in ways so that new opportunities for learning can be tried on your campus in the next quarter or semester.

You will need your class schedule for the coming term, office hours and days/times of any standing obligations (e.g. meetings). For reference, you may want to bring your course syllabus.

Supplies

Index cards, pads of “2x2” or “2x3” sticky-notes, flip-chart paper, felt marking pens, masking tape, sticky dots.

1. Personally engaging learning

Take a moment to reflect on your own *powerful experiences of learning* at any age, either inside or outside school. Based on an experience that first comes to mind, do a ‘quick write’ on an index card, noting what you learned. Share brief accounts of these experiences with your teaching partners (or in 2s or 3s); identify key points/common threads and write these on flip-chart paper and post. Circulate and read colleagues’ posters. Choose three points from among those posted that you would like to emphasize in designing integrated learning opportunities for students; mark these with sticky dots.

2. Passions and aspirations for students’ learning

In the context of your discipline, field or program area, what questions, issues, inquiry, and/or learning do you care deeply about? What *enduring learning* do you want students to gain from studying and working with you? Select a course/program that will be the starting-point for designing integrated learning. Think of actual students and imagine their lives, three or more years from now, in multiple contexts (further education, workplace, community, family, another country, etc.). *What do you want students to know and be able to do as a result of their participation in the course?* Write each of your responses to this question on a sticky-note (one point per note). Treat this as a brainstorming activity, getting down as many responses as you can (try to avoid single word responses).

3. Essential integration of expectations for student learning

Compare sticky-notes with your potential teaching collaborator(s); share expectations and make new sticky-notes if new expectations come to mind during your conversation. Cluster and chunk sticky-notes on a sheet of flipchart paper and look for meaningful connections (related themes, issues, concepts, expected understanding, habits of mind, abilities, skill sets, attitudes, etc.). Move sticky-notes around until the clusters make sense to

everyone. Label clusters using additional sticky-notes or marking pens; take time to find the appropriate words that best describe the expectation for learning that is common to the cluster. Set sticky-notes to the side which do not represent genuine common ground. You will be using this flip-chart sheet as a working diagram for designing assignments so make sure it is clear and well organized.

4. Schedules: Making a space for integrated learning

Make a schedule that details your typical week: class times, office hours, any standing obligations, etc. Share schedules with your partner(s). Pour over your schedules to find any common time when students and faculty could meet face-to-face as *a community of learners*. Your task is to either find time or *make time*, even if it falls outside of scheduled classes and office hours. Be very specific about total time available (e.g. one hour on most Thursdays, total 10 hours; one two-hour block in total on such-and-such a day). Make a diagram showing this ‘common time.’ Identify a time each week when you could meet with your partner(s) to plan, assess, and reflect on work. Use sticky-notes for details and place on flip-chart diagram.

5. Assignments as assessments: Designing down for integration

In the context of student work and your passions and aspirations for student learning, what stands out as a good assignment and why? What’s been your experience of unsuccessful assignments? Do a ‘quick write’ on an index card and share your insights with your partner(s). Pairing with another team, discuss this question: *what are the characteristics of good assignments?* Write key points on flip-chart paper and post. Read colleagues’ work and use sticky dots to identify five essential characteristics.

With the sticky-note diagram of shared expectations for student learning in team members’ view, brainstorm possibilities for integrated student learning, using the diagram as a common reference. After generating a number of ideas, choose one to work with that is appropriate for the time you have available for

face-to-face learning. Invent an assignment where students will be able to provide evidence of learning, where they can ‘use what they know.’ Consider these questions: Does the assignment foster personal engagement (see exercise 1)? Is the assignment designed with the characteristics of ‘good’ assignments in mind? Is what you care deeply about present?

Adopting a student’s perspective, use the method of ‘designing down’ from the integrated learning assignment to create a sequence of work/assignments so all students have opportunities to develop the understanding and required abilities to do well: what themes, issues, and concepts do they need to know and understand? what habits of mind, abilities, skill sets do they need to practice? Highlight these on your diagram.

Think of actual students who have studied with you: are there abilities they bring to doing this assignment? What do they need to *really* work on? Do a ‘quick write’; share with your partner(s). Where will this learning occur—during my class time? In time set aside for collaboration? Return to the time schedule and map out the implications.

Choose a day/time to meet to continue planning.
At this meeting refine your assignment to fit the circumstances of your work. Plan to address this question: How will we encourage students’ self-reflection and articulation of their own learning needs/experiences?

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A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

1. Foundational Knowledge

- "Understand and remember" learning

For example: facts, terms, formulae, concepts, principles, etc.

2. Application

- Thinking: critical, creative, practical (problem-solving, decision-making)
- Other skills

For example: communication, technology, foreign language

- Managing complex projects

3. Integration

- Making "connections" (i.e., finding similarities or interactions) . . .

Among: ideas, subjects, people

4. Human Dimensions

- Learning about and changing one's SELF
- Understanding and interacting with OTHERS

5. Caring

- Identifying/changing one's feelings, interests, values

6. Learning How to Learn

- Becoming a better student
- Learning how to ask and answer questions
- Becoming a self-directed learner

One important feature of this particular taxonomy is that each kind of learning is *interactive*, as illustrated in Figure 1. This means that each kind of learning can stimulate other kinds of learning. This has major implications for the learning goals you choose for your course. It may seem intimidating to try to include all six kinds of significant learning. But the more you can realistically include, the more the goals will support each other—and the more valuable will be your students' learning.

Quick Campus Assessment: Where is my campus now?

(1=we're there, 2=we're trying to get there, 3=we've started talking, 4=some of us have started to think about starting, 5=what?)

At my institution:

1. student learning is central to the university's mission and identity _____
2. initiatives to improve learning are visible and supported by the administration. _____
3. programs to improve first year student learning and experience have an administrative structure and budget. _____
4. several strategies for improving undergraduate education (learning communities, service learning or community-based learning, peer mentoring, interdisciplinary curriculum, integrative learning etc.) are integrated in curriculum throughout campus. _____
5. there is a coherent, thoughtful and valued general education curriculum. _____
6. undergraduate education has articulated and accepted learning outcomes. _____
7. there is regular assessment of student learning along each program's student learning goals. _____
8. assessment data is used for program improvement. _____
9. faculty participate in regular development activities. _____
10. teaching is evaluated and is important for promotion and tenure _____
11. there are criteria for evaluating teaching. _____
12. scholarship of teaching and learning and of engagement is valued in promotion and tenure decisions _____

Exercise 1

You have been given a number of different models that can help you to think about how to help students meet the outcomes of integrative learning. Think about your institution. Here are some questions:

- What is the size of your first year class?
- How flexible is your curriculum?
- How committed is your faculty/administration to integrative learning?
- Do you have some faculty who might be interested in pilot projects?
- What is the mission of your institution?
- Where do you think your first year students are relative to the ability to think in an integrative fashion? (look at the learning outcomes for different levels)?

Think about a plan of action. How would you move your campus to become more integrative? What do you see as the supports your campus may have for moving forward? What do you see as the impediments to moving forward? How might you enhance your strengths and move to overcome your impediments? Do you need to start with an educational plan that helps your institution to understand the importance of an integrative approach for first year students? What information might be useful in doing this?

Exercise 2

Design a program/assignment that would help your students to become integrative learners that works for your type of institution. For example, large public universities that have state-wide mandated general education might have a different plan than a small liberal arts institution. This could range from major curricular changes to within class assignments. Use the attached chart to help you think about learning outcomes.

Exercise 3

Develop a timeline and an assessment plan. What did you hope to accomplish by what date and did you do that? If, for example, you would like to pilot learning communities, how much time do you need to get that up and running? Who needs to be involved in the discussion? If you want students to live together, how do you involve housing in your discussions? Is the housing timeline different from the academic timeline? On another level, how will you assess your students to know that learning has taken place? Complete the attached learning outcomes sheet for what you are designing.

	Benchmark	How is this addressed in the program or assignment?	How would a student indicate mastery of this outcome?	Milestone (2)
Connections to Experience <i>Connects relevant experience and academic knowledge</i>	Identifies connections between life experiences and those academic texts and ideas perceived as similar and related to own interests			Compares life experiences and academic knowledge to infer differences, as well as similarities, and acknowledge perspectives other than own
Connections to the discipline <i>Sees (makes)connections across disciplines, perspectives</i>	When prompted, presents examples, facts or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.			When prompted, connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective
Transfer <i>Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations</i>	Uses, in a basic way, skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation in a new situation			Uses skills, abilities, theories or methodologies gained I none situation in a new situation to contribute to understanding of problems or issues
Integrated Communication	Fulfills the assignments(s) (i.e. to produce an essay, a poster, a video, a powerpoint presentation, etc.) in an appropriate			Fulfills the assignment(s) by choosing a format, language or graph (or other visual representation) that connects in a basic way what is being communicated(content) with

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	form			how it is said (form)
Reflection and Self-Assessment <i>Demonstrates a developing sense of self as a learner, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts (may be evident in self assessment, reflective, or creative work)</i>	Describes own performances with general descriptors of success and failure			Articulates strengths and challenges (within specific performances or events) to increase effectiveness in different contexts (through increased self awareness)

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