FROM EXCELLENT COURSES TO CONNECTED LEARNING: HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE COLLEGE

Talking about Teaching & Learning
Eastern Washington University
June 1, 2012
The Difficulties and Pleasures of Student Learning in the 21st Century

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April 27, 2012
April 27th Plan and Goals

• Reflect on the conditions of t&l today
• Review research about learning
• Identity a learning “problem” you care about
• Sample possible strategies for MLV
• Add your own examples, applications
• Plan for follow up
“Flash Examples”

• Strategies for investigating what students are and aren’t understanding, in ways that can help you make mid-lesson, mid-course improvements...

• ...and that can also build your students’ metacognitive skills

• No magic bullets, must adapt.

• Theme: making learning visible
Today’s Plan and Goals

Part I
• Revisit MLV theme
• More flash examples: from EWU
• What’s working, reflections, exchange of ideas

Part 2
• Moving from course-level to larger student experience
• What does all the course taking add up to?
• How do we help students connect the diverse, often fragmented pieces of their learning?
Part 1

• Peter Bilous, Chemistry
• Nadean Meyer, Library
• Reagan Henderson, English
Engaging Students in Out-of-Class Learning

On-line Interactive Learning Software
• Textbook specific Tutorials, Quizzes, & Chapter Problems

For Students:
• Interactive: Step-by-step instructions with answer-specific feedback and hints

For Instructors:
• Diagnostic Charts and Graphs (Scores, Task Time, Course and System Stats)
• Student scores are compared to National Database of Student Scores

Pearson Publishing Co. Mastering Chemistry Software:
• U of Kentucky: observed a “significant increase in the % of students earning A or B...” “the DFW rate fell dramatically from 41.6% to 30.2%”
• Butler University: Uses the American Chemical Society standardized exam for final exam in course. “... class average increased steadily from 64th percentile to 76th percentile”.
• Brigham Young University: most helpful component in learning, “Mastering Chemistry ... always ranked at or near the top, better than my lectures, and better than the clicker quizzes and text”
Student Research Skills-
EWU Libraries & Departments

• Faculty within Departments meet with librarian for goals for student success
• Assistance from library- time, ideas, resources, curriculum finding
• Quarterly reports on student success
• **Problem:** In Composition, students struggle with peer workshops because they prefer my “expert” feedback over the “novice” feedback of their peers, and they rarely know how to provide useful feedback or critique, thinking that critique should be kind and focus on pointing out errors.

• **Solution:** To help students adopt a more useful approach to critique, I have developed a multi-step process.

  • First, I ask students to look for **specific criteria** and focus on **one aspect at a time**; however, this process still tends to produce luck-of-the-draw results.

  • To further develop their skills, I ask: “What specific comment or type of feedback did you receive during the workshop that **benefited your paper the most**?” I find that by asking them to **pause, reflect, and pinpoint useful feedback**, they are more likely to have a positive attitude in our next workshop, and remember feedback they appreciated when it is time for them to comment on their peers’ papers.

  • My next step is to brainstorm this question: “Based upon the feedback you got from your first workshop **AND** the feedback you’ve now received from your professor, what types of comments and feedback are the most helpful?” At this stage, the answers are much more specific, such as “honesty,” “specificity,” “confusing sentences,” “asking questions,” and “where to add detail.”

  • These stages demonstrate growth in students’ ability to give feedback and a shift in their attitudes towards peer review.
BREAK
Part 2: Beyond the Course

• There is interest in going beyond course assessment to gain a sense of the intellectual/global/holistic transformation occurring in our students.

• How do we think big picture? How do we move from focusing on our slice of student learning (e.g., a course or two) to the larger student learning experience?
Some language for our theme today....

“The undergraduate experience is often a fragmented landscape of general education, concentration, electives, co-curricular activities, and ‘the real world’ beyond the campus. An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that will prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life.”
Why Integrative Learning?

- New understandings of how people learn
- A belief that students must learn to make their own connections—and that institutions must help them do so
- The “Flat World” phenomenon/globalization
- The “big problems” today are complex, multi-layered, unscripted
- ...with answers at disciplinary boundaries
- Employers want it
AND BECAUSE ...

...students shouldn’t have to reboot in every course.
Definitions and Varieties

• Integrative Learning connects
  – Within fields
  – Across fields
  – Theory and practice
  – Cognitive and affective dimensions of learning
  – Academic and personal life experience

• Levels
  – Student, Course, Department, Campus

Which of these are most important at EWU?
To you as an educator? To your colleagues?
To your field/program? To your students?
Integrated Learning at EWU

1. What do you think students would say about their EWU experience in terms of its coherence and connectedness? Is it a potluck dinner or a carefully crafted drama? An obstacle course or a guided tour?
2. What are the major obstacles to a greater sense of connectedness for students?
Obstacles

- Making integrative learning a reality for all students (challenges of student swirl, employment, competing commitments)
- Academic/dept silos
- Traditions of faculty autonomy and independence
- Classrooms as private spaces
- Faculty evaluation and reward policies
- General institutional inertia

From Carnegie/AACU project
Ways/Places to Promote Connections
-sorry, no flash examples--

• A focus on key assignments
• Team teaching
• Linked courses
• Learning communities
• Capstone courses/projects
• Portfolios
“I have had many amazing experiences at Michigan, but I didn’t really know what they meant or how they all fit together. Now, I see patterns and themes....The work I’ve been doing actually makes sense. There has been some direction to it all along. I also realize that my work is a reflection of me and that my identity and background have always played a part in my learning.”

--Univ of Michigan student (AAC&U)
And More

- Interdisciplinary programs
- Service learning/community-based learning
- Work on assessment—esp when focused on cross-cutting skills and outcomes
- Faculty development programs—talking about teaching and learning with others, across fields and levels, with attention to IL (like today)
Levels of Connection and Integration

• What is one thing you do or could do in a course you teach to help students make connections—e.g., between your course and other courses they take in your field, between your field and other fields they may studying, between theory and practice, between academic learning and life experience (any of these).

• Take a few minutes to reflect and write....
Levels of Connection and Integration

1. What do or could you do in your own courses to help students make connections?
2. What could departments do ...?
3. What new or different roles should/could students play in order to become more integrative learners?
4. What could the institution do, support, put in place, require?
What Will It Take?

1) The campus community hears about, understands, and embraces IL
2) Faculty have opportunities to work across disciplines, as teachers and as scholars
3) Academic and student affairs faculty share ideas and collaborate regularly
4) Reward/award systems recognize work forward IL
5) Institutional assessment/IR/program review include a focus on students’ integrative abilities, and results are used for improvement
6) Administrative leaders talk to one another and collaborate across units in support of IL
“Fostering students’ abilities to integrate learning—across courses, over time, and between campus and community life—is one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education.”

--CARNEGIE FOUNDATION AND AAC&U
Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect

Welcome to the Integrative Learning Project's Public Report

Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect is a national project sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Aimed at promoting integrative learning in undergraduate education, this three-year project worked with ten campuses to develop and assess advanced models and strategies to foster students' abilities to integrate their learning over time. This report, with an overview by Carnegie and AAC&U staff and accounts from each of the participating campuses (see menu on the left), aims to make the project's work available to other campuses interested in helping students pursue their learning in more intentional, connected ways.

What is Integrative Learning?

Fostering students' abilities to integrate learning--over time, across courses, and between academic, personal, and community life--is one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education. The undergraduate experience is often a fragmented landscape of general education, concentration, electives, co-curricular activities, and for many students "the real world" beyond campus. An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates find ways to put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that will prepare them to make informed decisions about their lives.

Leading Campus Change

Individual faculty members can do much to strengthen integrative learning through decisions about course design, pedagogy and assignments. But individual efforts, by themselves, cannot create and sustain the opportunities students need to develop as integrative thinkers over the full arc of their college careers. For this to happen, collaborative efforts at the campus, program, and departmental levels are needed both to institute new practices where necessary, and to ensure that programs already in place reinforce and build on one
RESOURCES

http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/ilp/
Website/materials from the Carnegie/AACU project “Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect.”

http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm
AACU’s work on Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education. Integrative Learning is one of the essential outcomes. You’ll also find a rubric for assessing IL.

Article from Insider Higher Education

http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ilc/models.html
5 models of integrated learning communities
To be continued....
Smarter Discussion at Mills College

• An interest in the relationship between good writing and the quality of class discussion
• Goal: To use discussion to foster attention to coherence, connections, transitions, etc.
• Students use colored cards—each signaling a different discussion “move”:
  – Building on
  – Disagreeing
  – Summarizing
  – Changing topics
  – Etc

“Conversacolor,” by Cynthia Scheinberg