CCATF GenEd Conversations
27 March 2024

Topic: Integrative Experiences
Location: King Hall 259
Max participants at any one time: 11
Total people attending: 11

Notes:

Session began with an overview of the topic; in terms of a students' college education, the parts (GenEd, Major, electives, degree requirements) and the whole (BS/BA degree), are both important. Photograph of ingredients in bowls: eggs, flour, sugar, etc. and one of a completed cake. Separate ingredients take on different meaning when combined to make a cake. Prompt: When you were undergrads, what were you interested in studying? Were there courses/places where you began to connect to other things that you were studying?

EX: I was a BIO major. Took a course associated with the campus poetry center. Based on that, I declared creative writing as second major. Faculty advisors discouraged it, but I eventually blended both and became tech/science writer.
EX. My experiences were very siloed, not connected. Speaks to integration between broad programs like GenEd and programs in majors, also workforce.
EX: I was also a double major undergrad. Recall an urban studies course that connected learning in separate disciplinary courses. I wish we could find a way to give students that opportunity.

Integrative experiences are HIPs. Lots of research now on benefits of metacognition, especially for adult learners, including college students (as opposed to children and teens).

We are talking, potentially, about Study Abroad? Yes, that is an example of integrative learning, so is service learning. These are learning experiences that require the learner to make connections between prior experiences, courses, and the new ones.

It's expensive to have HIPS because they are typically small seminars. I have enjoyed teaching and having smaller classes; in my 300-level integrative, I can do that, incorporate HIPs. I have to beg to be released to do it though.

Review: integrative courses are designed to be summative for the student(s), helping them with synthesizing, building connections. Examples at other institutions exist, could be found.

How are the current courses doing? Instructor of a UNST offers a story of a student who was transformed, said they had never had an opportunity to work so closely with an instructor.

Is there interest in teaching an integrative course in the room? Strong yes. Bringing in different disciplinary perspectives would also be a benefit. Description of how some integrative experiences work; a capstone in the major is often integrative but narrow, only integrative within the discipline; others can be broader, more holistically integrative like ENVT. Schools our size tend to combine a variety of learning experiences, connected within a program area.

What would be some barriers to such a thing here?
- FTE problems.
- Students' own food and housing precarity, many need linked courses so that they don't have to take everything, so they can take other courses that help them.
- Team teaching is challenging, but beneficial. It amplifies connections between faculty, too, disciplinary areas. "Ways of knowing" projects. Some campuses have groups of faculty teaching collaboratively.

Is this something junior faculty can do? Is it more appropriate for mid-career?

The part that is interdisciplinary requires different support, so junior faculty would need more and depts need to understand better. As a mid-career person, I have more security now.

It depends on what we value, and we are so focused on majors and jobs, not learning. Leadership has not pushed us to affirm our values. This project speaks to a JMU core value!

It feels like leadership is moving away from quality teaching to even bigger section sizes, CHP.

This project resembles what you see at R2s and R1s. Could be what is needed, timing is right.

We have been in an identity crisis for years. It's affecting department culture, the shift away from teaching. Parents what to know what their students are learning.

So, what is the role of GenEd in this conversation? Many faculty value GenEd because it enables them to talk with a range of students, it enables you to convey your field, but also an opportunity for students to make these connections. It feels like what we should be doing.

What would it take to get support to teach this way?

In CAL and IDLS, some of us are talking about a train the trainer model, a kind of institute that creates a community. X-Labs is also an interesting community of practice. When I co-taught in X-labs, X-labs bought me out of my dept course.

Systems of support are so directed at the majors. GenEd is basically unfunded. We need support for co-teaching, for innovative pedagogy, buying out of faculty time. Not having that structure hurts us.

We used to have cross-disc studies with a budget, office support. That model could work.

CCATF survey indicated that many faculty who teach in GenEd are siloed, they don't know much about the program itself. We need more opportunities to connect.

Student attitudes matter. Discussion of their vocationalism, how to engage them in new ways in their own education. How are we not getting across to students the important relevance of what we value? JMU has moved more and more toward the major, a constant drumbeat, so it's hard to break through that. AI is an example, it generates interest and anxiety, but they can't see it because they are only 19 years old!

This might not be the right question. All I can do at JMU is complain; it's very hierarchical. We have to make the university leadership care. In another session, we talked about being powerless. There isn't reward here. Have to explain to people how to reward it.

Perhaps the answer is collective action, collaboration. GenEd faculty connecting across units. GenEd is the connective tissue. Some faculty do think GenEd is a punishment, however. As we move into more research focus, there will be those who don't want to teach in the program or this way. And maybe they don't have to.

Integration can happen in other forms, too, such as adding modules into courses.

END OF NOTES