



Forming a creative core: Interdisciplinary assessment in introductory courses

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The purpose of the session is to describe interdisciplinary learning outcomes and key course assessments for an introductory course linking the fields of art, design, and merchandising. At Indiana University the Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design Department and the Fine Arts Studio Program voted to merge and form a School of Art and Design, administrated under the College of Arts and Sciences. In this reorganization of programs within a liberal arts environment, faculty held consensus that one of the most exciting opportunities for the school would be to institute course structures that allowed for interdisciplinary interaction throughout the program. Multi and interdisciplinary learning became a key attribute in the conception of the “Creative Core” of the School, or a common base of classes concerned with engaging students in both discipline specific learning and interdisciplinary outcomes. Each program (Apparel Merchandising, Fashion Design, Ceramics, Textiles, Painting, etc.) will require of majors a number of Creative Core courses that introduce disciplinary methods while at the same time emphasizing comparative understanding of other disciplinary approaches.

Interdisciplinary learning is supported as an approach that moves from a traditional focus on memorization of facts to a focus on themes, application of knowledge to selected themes, and reflection on thinking (Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002). Pedagogical strategies that are characteristic of interdisciplinary learning are inherent to approaches in the art and design fields; including emphasis on coping with difficult tasks, flexibility in searching for multiple solutions, finding connections among ideas, and application of knowledge across context (Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002). Adoption of interdisciplinary methods within the Creative Core of the school intends to promote complex thinking skills that “balance a focus on thinking process with a focus on learning specific content” (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p.286).

Each of the authors collaborated with Fine Arts Studio and Design faculty to offer introductory level cross-disciplinary workshops. The term “workshop” is used to describe courses focused on skill development and technical manipulations of materials within the specific traditions of particular disciplines and in fundamental principles of art, design, and merchandising. Students move from eight weeks of work in one discipline to work in a second discipline the next eight weeks, with cross-disciplinary critiques connecting classrooms in

between. The initial paired 8 week classes include two courses, each with a different theme; Form and Material: Surface Design in Jewelry and Fashion, and Branding in Merchandising and Graphic Design. Students engage in two distinct, disciplinary processes of thinking and working to facilitate comparison, contrast, and recognition of intersections.

As a part of the introductory Creative Core of the school, this course, regardless of topic, should provide students with both beginning disciplinary experiences and cross-disciplinary learning achievements. As suggested by Repko (2008), cognitive abilities students develop, and therefore learning outcomes faculty assess, include:

- View the course theme from the perspective of two disciplines
- Perceive connections between two disciplinary domains
- Integrate conflicting disciplinary insights
- Produce a more complex understanding of the course theme

Examination of interdisciplinary learning outcomes provides a cross-course assessment of the ability of students interested in merchandising to achieve learning outcomes within sections that are in the art and design disciplines and vice versa. A continual analysis of the capabilities of undergraduate students to move from multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary learning and perspectives provides insight as to how early interdisciplinary engagement impacts student achievement later in their studies, when students move from the Creative Core into their respective disciplinary studies. Ultimately, the role of interdisciplinary outcome assessment provides the basis for understanding how introductory interdisciplinary approaches in the Creative Core may or may not be contributing to fostering a creative merchant, fashion designer, or entrepreneurial artist.

#### Works Cited

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