

Faculty Forum 11/17/09
Integrative Learning
Reports of Breakout Sessions

The below report was prepared by merging the breakout session minutes into several basic categories in an attempt to reflect the wide-ranging discussions which occurred at the forum. I made no attempt to tabulate the number of times specific issues were raised.

Rationale for Integrative Learning: Students can experience the value of a broad education, while building skills needed for employment, rather than content area knowledge. Reflective assignments can be a powerful force for change and growth in students' lives if done well. An integrative curriculum might encourage students to broaden their view of the options available for them at EIU.

Pedagogies: Among the topics participants discussed were the many different models of integrative learning, including:

- Emphasizing critical thinking
- Making connections between classroom learning and out-of-classroom action, for example volunteer work, service learning, study abroad, internships, and student teaching
- Exploring in class the contemporary relevance of coursework
- Reflective activities, which ask students to actively connect what they are learning to their personal and/or professional development

Models: Faculty also discussed different ways these models might already exist on campus, or might be embodied in practice:

- Study abroad
- Strengthening interdisciplinary programs as well as creating/supporting discipline and content-specific integrative learning models
- Team teaching
- Use of technology, perhaps incorporating social networking
- Expanding the University Foundations course
- Different class compositions (e.g. enrolling classes if students in the same residence hall or other forms of cohort teaching)
- Outward Bound, ROTC

Implementation: Faculty also expressed concern about how an Integrative Learning initiative might be implemented on campus.

- Add integrative learning components incrementally rather than do a complete overhaul of all curricula
- Need to implement changes from below, on the initiative of faculty who are interested, rather than as mandates from the administration
- Exemplary faculty or programs could serve as models; many, perhaps most faculty already use integrative learning techniques

Institutional commitment: Adopting pedagogies appropriate to content areas—for example, developing service learning curricula, team-taught courses, cohort learning—could be encouraged if resources were made available—grants, c.u. reductions, and the like.

Grading/assessment: Faculty also raised a series of questions regarding pedagogy, especially the “reflective” elements. Many faculty wondered how to grade reflective assignments without turning them into rote exercises. Shifting assessment of student work from mastery of content areas and discipline-specific skills to drawing “connections” raised similar questions for faculty. Some faculty suggested that making these pedagogies a requirement would encourage rote feedback rather than stimulate engagement on the part of students.

Impediments: If implemented through additional requirements, it might not encourage student engagement. Many faculty wondered how to encourage students to buy in to these pedagogies/strategies.

Another set of concerns questioned students’ ability to make the most of integrative learning. Students can find themselves under tremendous pressure to succeed, and from an earlier age, than previous generations of students. Some indication that integrative learning might not be cognitively appropriate for students, might rely on skills/abilities typically developed later than college years.

Faculty also wondered how the focus would work with transfer students, and specifically noted this problem in the previous integrated core curriculum.