



Eighth Annual Curriculum Development Retreat  
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Kellogg West Conference Center - Cal Poly Pomona

## **Designing Purposeful & Integrative Assignments**

*An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life.*

*A Statement on Integrative Learning, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)*

- **This work session introduces an effective teaching strategy addressing the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century students. Faculty members will examine one method of designing an interdisciplinary assignment which intentionally fosters integrative learning.**
- **This session will examine some of the steps in creating a purposeful integrative assignment:**
  - **to make clear the learning outcomes this assignment supports for each of the classes,**
  - **the curricular and co-curricular resources to use,**
  - **the stages (scaffolding) of students' preparation for the assignment,**
  - **the ways in which the students' work becomes public.**
- **What is integrative and/or interdisciplinary learning?**

**Integrative learning is the “capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking drawn from two or more disciplines in order to produce a cognitive advancement – explaining a phenomenon, solving a problem, creating a product or raising a new question - in ways that would have been unlikely through a single disciplinary means.”**

**Veronica Boix-Mansilla**

## What is integrative and/or interdisciplinary learning?

- Integrative learning builds on a performance view of understanding - one that privileges the capacity to use knowledge over that of simply having or accumulating it. Individuals understand a concept when they are able to apply it - or think with it - accurately and flexibly in novel situations.
- Interdisciplinary knowledge is *disciplined* - deeply informed by *disciplinary expertise*.
- Interdisciplinary understanding *builds on knowledge and modes of thinking* central to the work of experts.
- Interdisciplinary understanding involves the *integration* of disciplinary views; they actively inform one another.
- Interdisciplinary understanding is *purposeful*. It is a means to achieve a cognitive advancement: a new insight, a solution, or an explanation.
- Interdisciplinary understanding provides a *blueprint* for examining student interdisciplinary work, to find *evidence* of accomplishment, and to *identify ways* to support improved understanding.

## Designing Purposeful & Integrative Assignments

The student work in learning communities should be:

**intentional** (clear goals and objectives, including stages of development [scaffolding]),

**explicit** (What exactly do I want students to learn?),

**interdisciplinary** (multiple domains of knowledge), and

**integrated** (a *different* product developed with elements from various disciplines).

# What do students want to know and be able to do?

Our goal is to be able to articulate the following:

Students will integrate \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ in order to do \_\_\_\_\_.

What do you most want students to learn from your discipline/area of expertise?

What learning outcomes will this assignment/project support?

How are these related to the outcomes for your particular disciplines or courses?

## References:

### **Designing Integrated Learning for Students: A Heuristic for Teaching, Assessment, and Curriculum Design**

*Gillies Malnarich and Emily Lardner. Washington Center Occasional Paper. Winter 2003.*

What students learn is shaped by the assignments or assessments they are invited to do. The focus of this heuristic, which can be adapted for use in many kinds of institutional settings, is on designing compelling, substantive and integrative experiences of learning for students.

### **Assessing Student Learning at Disciplinary Crossroads**

*Veronica Boix-Mansilla. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning. January/February 2005.*

This article explores what "interdisciplinary understanding" means and describes a framework for assessing student interdisciplinary work.

### **A New Era in Learning Community Work: Why the Pedagogy of Intentional Integration Matters**

*Emily Lardner and Gillies Malnarich. Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning. 2008.*

This article describes a significant shift in emphasis in learning community practice over the past decade: from a focus on models and organizational structures to a focus on intentionally designed integrative learning for students.