

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASE STUDY: INSIGHTS FROM THE FACILITATED DISCUSSION BASED ON STUDENTS' WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

SUMMARY FINDING: Classroom conversations (through student-led discussion and/or seminar) and collaborative learning activities promoted the collective construction of knowledge, thus deepening students' understanding of the subject matter, themselves, and the world around them.

Six Emerging Themes from the Validation Study & Protocol Analysis

1. Students are learning critical habits of mind in LCs.
2. Students are changing their minds, themselves, and their communities.
3. LC students' new knowledge, developing skills, new perspectives, and emerging sensibilities are being transferred to other classes and their personal lives.
4. Faculty can be powerful models of integrative dispositions, habits, and scholarship.
5. A collaborative approach to integrative assignments resulted in deeply integrative learning experiences.
6. LC students engage in more integrative learning, receive more encouragement to do so, are motivated to do more work overall, and accomplish more in comparison to their other classes.

Sample Student Responses: Learning With and From Each Other

Carbon-Free Energy: Fantasy or Future

[English Literature & Introduction to Clean Energy Resources]

Student Quotation

“The interdisciplinary approach to learning helps us to reach new understandings and applications because it forces students to think as a member of a community with some sense of belonging that drives our desire to work together and to help each other learn.”

Discussion Notes

Along with the usual academic instruction, the professors initiated student involvement in the classroom, field trips, and what the students referred to as peer teaching. The students described the class as student--centered and interactive. For example, students presented their “final” research projects (consisting of a research paper and power-point presentation) as the topic emerged in the text over the course of the semester. In this way each student became an in--class authority on that topic and interacted with the relevant texts, the teachers, and the rest of the class.

I, Too, Sing America: The Harlem Renaissance and Racial Identity

[Topics in Literature & History]

Student Quotation

“After making the connections between mine and my classmates’ views, I am able to better understand the material. From our combined insights I see other people’s perspectives or pick up themes or other ideas that I did not notice before.”

Discussion Notes

Students stated that their LC connected them to each other, the faculty and the subjects: “In LCs we engage, discuss and build on each others’ ideas.”

Good Planets (and People) are Hard to Find: Choices and Challenges for Life on Earth

[Environmental Economics & Environmental Ethics]

Student Quotation

“The power of the tangent, one mention of something strikes someone in the class discussion to then bring up Foucault or another thinker, anecdote, query, whatever might apply – new insights emerged.”

Discussion Notes

The longer class time allowed for in- depth discussion and feedback, which enabled students to catch something they might have missed on their own and build on each others' ideas. Students reported that their LC provided a more in-depth study and understanding of the material than do their stand-alone courses, not only because of the additional time available but because classroom conversations are valued as an integrative activity in their own right.

Healing on the Page

[English Composition & Introduction to Human Services]

Student Quotation

“I learned how important it is to understand someone's culture and background and what barriers each target population faces...The service learning hours at the Care Center really helped me to understand the concepts we were discussing in class and reading about.”

Discussion Notes

According to students, the most integrative part of the LC was their participation in the service learning project with the *Care Center*, a not-for-profit community organization serving teen mothers who have not completed high school. The LC students worked collaboratively with the Care Center students, in effect acting as both students and teachers as they learned together.

Framing American (In)Justice

[English Composition & Introductory Anthropology]

Student Quotation

“We worked on a social action project, which involved a research paper on a subject/topic where we could make a difference. We also had to act on making change. I realized I could make a difference and plan to continue the “action” part of my project when this class is over.”

Discussion Notes

In this LC students stated they look at people and ideas differently now. They feel they have an increased awareness regarding social issues, the world in general, and the media specifically. “I can’t even watch television without analyzing it,” laughs a student. Students reported that they are more sensitive and alert to the “isms” (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) especially in the media but also in people’s speech and behavior, including themselves.

The Immigrant City

[Inter-Institutional LC: HCC-Political Science & Amherst College-History]

Student Quotation

“We were often given free rein to research and study documents and events of our own choosing. Through discussion we each brought new facts and findings that would help our fellow students in their research...there is an unimaginable beauty when a group of people can share information freely and be excited the entire time. Everyone’s opinion mattered a great deal to me.”

Discussion Notes

Students in this LC reported they were “scholars in residence” so to speak, as they researched primary source documents, presented their findings, and taught each other what they learned about immigration in the city of Holyoke.