

Designing Integrative/Interdisciplinary Assignments

What question or issue makes this assignment meaningful for students?

Your Task: Create an assignment that explicitly invites students to use two or more disciplinary perspectives in order to address a meaningful question or issue. The task needs to be complex enough to require students to engage in integrative or interdisciplinary thinking¹.

Questions to Consider:

- How is the task relevant for your students - why will they find it engaging?
- How will working on this task deepen or extend or complicate students' thinking about the questions/issues at the center of your LC/LLC?
- As students work on this task, how will you guide them to notice when and how they are exercising integrative/interdisciplinary thinking?
- What are the disciplinary understandings that students will need to draw on?

Co-curricular connections

Campus or community events

Residence hall

Common public issue

Local experts and speakers

Field Trips

Films or performances shared across courses

Course #1 disciplinary understanding

Knowledge: ability to use key elements, concepts, relationships, theories and schools of thought in the discipline

Methods: ability to engage in modes of inquiry that characterize the discipline, research methods, evidence, creation

Purpose: an understanding of the goal that drive disciplinary inquiry and the ways in which knowledge can be used

Forms: ability to use the languages and forms of communication typical of the discipline (essays, artwork, scientific reports)

Course #2 disciplinary understanding

Knowledge: ability to use key elements, concepts, relationships, theories and schools of thought in the discipline

Methods: ability to engage in modes of inquiry that characterize the discipline, research methods, evidence, creation

Purpose: an understanding of the goal that drive disciplinary inquiry and the ways in which knowledge can be used

Forms: ability to use the languages and forms of communication typical of the discipline (essays, artwork, scientific reports)

¹Boix Mansilla, V. & Dawes Duraising, E. (March/April 2007). Targeted Assessment of Students' Interdisciplinary Work: An Empirically Grounded Framework Proposed. *The Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. 78. No. 2.

Next step in planning: What opportunities to learn, practice and refine these (i) disciplinary understandings and (ii) interdisciplinary moves will be important to build into the courses and LC?

For a full description of the process for using this heuristic on your campus, see: Malnarich, G. & Lardner, E. (2003). *Designing Integrated Learning for Students: A Heuristic for Teaching, Assessment and Curriculum Design*. *Washington Center Occasional Paper*.

For a description of a slightly different approach to designing integrative assignments, see: Graziano, J., Schlesinger, M. R., Kahn, G. & Singer, R. (2016). A Workbook for Designing, Building, and Sustaining Learning Communities. *Learning Communities Research and Practice*, Vol. 4 Iss. 1. Art. 6. Available at: <http://washingtoncenter.evergreen.edu/lcrjournal/vol4/iss1/6>

For more information on the overall process of designing curriculum by beginning with the end in mind, see: Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). "Backward Design". *Understanding by Design*: ASCD. Pg. 13-34.

For a current context (2017) of backward design, see also:
Bowen, Ryan S. (2017). *Understanding by Design*. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved June 28, 2017 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/understanding-by-design/>.

For more information on designing transparent assignments, see:
The University of Nevada Las Vegas "Transparency in Learning and Teaching Project" website.
<https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency>

For more information about a framework for considering how to insure that assignments provide equitable learning opportunities to students, please see:
Milner, H.R. (2011). Let's Focus on Gaps in Opportunity, not Achievement. *Education Week*. Iss. May.