Integrating Learning in Course Clusters: Short Form

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To: Trinity Faculty <TrinityFaculty@trinity.edu>  
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Dear Colleagues,

From conversations this year, it is clear to that a number of you would appreciate occasional email posts from the Collaborative that address an instructional or curricular topic, idea, or example in short form. This post serves as a starting point for such correspondence.

Today's Example: Integrating Learning in Course Clusters

Wingert et al. (2011)* report that cross-course projects and activities for course clusters that share a set of common learning outcomes can:

- produce statistically significant positive gains in students' evaluation of their learning.
- help students integrate their learning experience across semesters
- provide opportunity for more experienced students to mentor junior students
- provide project based contexts for students in disciplines to learn from on another.

These observations follow from an assessment study of a "Food for Thought" course cluster at the University of North Carolina. The study describes:

- strategies for experiential cross-course cluster projects
- learning outcomes for course clusters
- logistical approaches for coordinating a course cluster
- pros/cons for faculty involved in these cross-course projects.

The Cluster Program at the University of North Carolina provides examples of cross-disciplinary course themes, the questions they address, and the disciplines they link.

You may find these examples useful with regard to envisioning First Year Experiences and/or ID Clusters at Trinity.

Regards,

Sean


Limitations of the study reported by the authors include:

- a relatively low student response rate (20.7%) to the study survey instrument and biases that favor non-significant changes for the survey items.
- the short duration of the analysis (one semester): the impact of interdisciplinary course clusters on student learn might be more apparent over multiple semesters
- the number of courses in the cluster taken by the student during the study period.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like a copy of this paper.
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