Interdisciplinary Studies

INTEGRATING FIELDS ACROSS DISCIPLINARY LINES – FACILITATING LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING
"General Studies," "Comparative Literature" – education connections

BA: The Evergreen State College, 1991
  ▶ State college (cheap, diverse)
  ▶ Intro courses team-taught, across disciplines
  ▶ Experiential (travel, internships, "camping for credit")
  ▶ No majors
  ▶ "learning how to learn"

PhD: University of California, Davis, 2001
  ▶ Combining literature, language, culture, theory, history
  ▶ Focus on interest, experience, writing
  ▶ Teaching: English Comp, Comparative Lit, Religious Studies, American Studies, ESL

"Generalist" – comp, American lit, children’s lit, theory, world lit, postcolonial lit, …
Director of Interdisciplinary Studies since 2017

Editor/translator; software and print, 1992-1995:
Microsoft Corporation
Students – YWM Coalition: 1st gen, underrepresented student population

- Lack of context – individual courses are confusing
- Lack of understanding of educational structure = lack of control over educational/professional destiny
- Making the structure visible
- Nothing “sticks”
- Unfamiliar references to history, geography, politics, issues, art
- Building a “grid” – helping students acquire, process, connect information

Empower student:
- Build confidence
- Build general knowledge
- Build research skills
- Acknowledge existing interests, expertise
- Foster curiosity
Learning outcomes (vs. subject-specific fact knowledge):

General skills:
- Reading
- Writing
- Communicating in groups
- Understanding context
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking, mental dexterity
- Metacognition

What do you want the student to take away from your class?
- General understanding of subject – in relation to other subjects, professions, disciplines
- Love for, or interest in, subject
- Some experience researching information in the subject
- Confidence and interest in further studies
- Specific skills
- Specific knowledge
Making connections across disciplines: providing visual context for material

ENG245

Guest lecture:
Ask a colleague who teaches material related to your field. Share responsibility of planning the class, so the material directly relates to your class.
Benefits: makes context visible, makes disciplines visible.
More interesting, maybe?

In-class lecture:
Add images and sounds of background materials, based on google search
Slides of history, art, culture, geography
Create library of materials for repeat themes/projects

Out-of-class research, student presentations
Assign student groups to research specific background information (support/advise in meetings, set guidelines)
Students present images, professor adds info during presentations.
Invite all students to comment and offer connections
Adding Humanities Content to Business Courses: Leadership in the context of history

HIS/SOC/ENG/PSY

Research polar explorer Edward Shackleton from the perspective of leadership;
Consider contexts of world history (1914: WW I) and absence of technology;
Present on leadership techniques under extreme circumstances

Research business and leadership practices in the 1980s;
Research economy and car production in 1980s,
Present on the success of Iacocca’s book in its historical context

Cars, wages, production: Economic theory under Henry Ford’s innovation;
Attitudes towards immigrants and Jews in the early 20th century labor market
Crossing Boundaries: classroom and “real world”  
(but not: internship)

“field trip project” on marketing
- Compare store arrangements, sales promotions, and item displays between Walmart and a small boutique store;
- Can result in a paper or a visual presentation, photos

Interview project about relationship between course work and career experience
COM/SOC/EDU
- Students interview two or three friends/family/coworkers who hold 2-year or 4-year degrees
- Ask questions about degrees/certification programs, relationship between training/studies and professional experience
- Results in video about the interviews, assessing and comparing
- Outcome: awareness of application of skills and knowledge, understanding relevance of course content.
Assessment: reflection, journal, alternative “exams”

- Emphasize learning over acquisition of facts
- Encourage exploration, leave room for error and revision
- See what is there, not only what is missing
- “moving the needle” – different starting points; different end points; focus on individual net gain
- Choice in “exam” content: offer word bank as guidance, let student determine focus of final project/exam
- Reflections: emphasizing the process rather than the result