

Integrative Learning Experiences: Benchmark Achievements, Connotations, & Preferences

Erin Hanson, Alexis Benjamin, & Nicole J. Schultz, Ph.D. (Faculty Mentor)
Department of Communication & Journalism ❖ Women's Studies Program



Research Questions

- RQ1: To what extent do students **achieve integrative learning benchmarks** of UWEC's integrative learning rubric in CJ/WMNS 111 (Gender, Race, Class, & Communication: The Social Construction of Identity)?
- RQ2: In what ways are students **aware** of the extent to which they engage in UWEC's elements of integrative learning in CJ/WMNS 111 curriculum?

Abstract

Research shows that creating and evaluating strategies that encourage students to engage in integrative learning (IL) promotes advancement of personal, educational, and professional development (Newell, 2010; Flower & Rhodes, 2005). Studies illustrate that the commitment to providing students with higher education IL opportunities should be practiced intentionally to maximize student connections to course material and across disciplines (Werdner, 2013; Miller, 2005). The purpose of the current study was to examine the extent to which students engaged in IL and the extent to which students were aware of such. Data was collected via focus group interviews and student work from students enrolled in a cross-listed first-year only course and analyzed using thematic analysis and the UWEC IL Liberal Education Assessment Rubric (Draft: 8/16/13). Results of analysis of student work revealed the vast majority of students met or exceeded UWEC's IL benchmarks of connecting academic knowledge to personal experiences, making connections across disciplines, and applying academic knowledge from one context to another context. Analysis of focus group interview data revealed that intentional engagement in IL contributes to broadened student perspectives of the potential interconnectedness across disciplines in higher education.

Method

Data Collection

- Data for RQ1 was collected via convenience sampling of written artifacts from 18 students enrolled in a first-year only section of CJ/WMNS 111 including theory/construct application papers, gender-race-class connections across disciplines papers, and transfer between contexts project submissions.
- Data for RQ2 was collected via semi-structured focus group interviews with CJ/WMNS 111 students, including 1 male and 17 females ranging in age from 18-20 from various and undeclared majors.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative methods were used to analyze student written artifacts using the elements and benchmarks of UWEC's Integrative Learning Rubric to answer RQ1.
- Qualitative primary and secondary coding (Owen 1984) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) thematic analysis methods were used to analyze focus group interview data to answer RQ2.

Element	Benchmark not met (0 Points)	Benchmark met (1 Point)	Benchmark exceeded (2 Points)
A. Student demonstrates a developing sense of self as a learner by connecting academic knowledge to own experiences.	Does not effectively identify own viewpoint, values, or understanding, or makes no connections between academic knowledge and own experience.	Connects and compares own experience and academic knowledge to discern similarities and differences, acknowledges perspectives other than own, and recognize how own values and understanding are formed.	Analyzes examples of own experience or values, drawn from a variety of contexts, to demonstrate a deepened understanding of discipline(s). Evaluates changes in own learning and understanding, recognizing contextual factors (e.g., works with ambiguity and risk, deals with frustration, considers ethical frameworks).
B. Student makes connections across disciplines.	May present examples, facts, or theories from more than one discipline, but does not effectively tie them together or show connections. Confines analysis to one discipline.	Develops basic connections between or among two or more disciplines to convey knowledge or explain problems or issues. Uses examples, facts, or theories from two or more disciplines to convey knowledge or explain problems or issues.	Skillfully connects examples, facts, or theories from two or more disciplines to address a particular issue, problem, or question. Provides evidence (examples, facts or theories) from two or more disciplines to support a position.
C. Student applies skills, knowledge, or methodologies gained in one academic or experiential context to a different academic or experiential context.	Does not effectively use, adapt or apply skills, knowledge, or methodologies gained in one academic or experiential context to a new context or may do so at a superficial level.	Applies skills, knowledge, or methodologies gained in one academic or experiential context in a different academic or experiential context to convey knowledge or explain issues.	Adapts skills, knowledge, or methodologies gained in one academic or experiential context to discuss complex issues or solve problems, with sufficient support.

Works Cited

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 509-536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 Flower, M., & Rhodes, T. (2005). Integrative learning and assessment. *Peer Review*(7) 4, 21-23.
 Miller, R. (2005). Integrative learning and assessment. *Peer Review*(7) 4, 11-14.
 Newell, W. (2010). Integrative learning and interdisciplinary studies. *Liberal Education*(96), 4, 6-11.
 Owen W. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 274-287.
 UWEC. (Draft.: 8/16/13). Integrative learning rubric worksheet. Retrieved from http://www.uwec.edu/Assess/libed/upload/All_Rubrics.pdf
 Werdner, C. (2013). *The scholarship of teaching and learning in and across disciplines*. (pp. 240-252). Indiana University Press.

Results & Discussion

RQ1: Analysis of written student artifacts revealed the extent to which and in what ways participants met or exceeded integrative learning element benchmarks.

Integrative Learning Rubric Element A: Connections to Own Experiences

Theory/Construct Papers: 88% Achieved or Exceeded Benchmark 1

- "Intersectionality is a theory that combines areas of potential inequalities such as race, class, age, or gender...my parents' views on government subjects were close-minded and racist...it was hard for me to understand how they could judge people and make oppressive assumptions about them because of race or class."
- "I remember always having problems with friendships. I had conflicts with friends...I now understand my friend was experiencing the looking-glass self or imagining how she looked to another person."

Integrative Learning Rubric Element B: Connections Across Disciplines

Gender-Race-Class Connections Across Disciplines Papers: 100% Achieved or Exceeded Benchmark 1

- "Crossover periods allow individuals to obtain their perception of the ideal life. However, many people fail or never try to cross over. Semiotic tradition [CJ] explains why people want to cross over. Oppression [WMNS] explains how individuals feel when they fail at attaining the ideal life. However, crossover periods would never need to occur if our society did not misperceive unequal opportunity or the domination of...class."
- "Justin's story is a perfect example of the mental stress that is put on young adults when they have STIs. They face oppression...they have to face 'binds' [WMNS]. They also face the idea of the semantic triangle [CJ] and what people will assume their condition is without proper knowledge of the reference and symbol."

Integrative Learning Rubric Element C: Transfer Between Contexts

Transfer Between Contexts Project Submissions: 82% Achieved or Exceeded Benchmark 1

- "In our project we attempted to disprove stereotypes to persuade against racist thoughts or beliefs...we had to confront issues belonging to their latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and non-commitment...because race is such a high ego-involvement issue, one in which people will be invested in emotionally, we knew that we would have to discuss issues of acceptance and commitment to persuade them."
- "A method learned through the execution of the project of connecting disciplines to convey information and findings about social class made me a more active learner...the group I presented to from the Silent Generation had a great discussion about the idea that the problem isn't simply about race, but also about class and education."

RQ2: Analysis of focus group data unveiled participants' awareness of integrative learning engagement and preferences they have surrounding integrative learning experience formats.

Student Connotations of Integrative Learning

Participants identified the application of course material to life experiences as a defining characteristic of integrative learning. Connotations also prioritized the significance of how opinions on societal issues can be viewed through different disciplinary lenses to result in diverse understandings of phenomena while simultaneously recognizing interconnectedness.

- "Integrative learning is the first step in being able to succeed in higher education. I think the earlier you are able to make those connections between different areas the more successful you will be."
- "Because it can help broaden your views...every subject that we focus on we look at from different perspectives and it is really interesting to see how they correlate."
- "This class has helped me create my own opinion on societal issues. Before, I thought I maybe had an opinion but I really didn't have one either way...[in this class] I made actual connections and now know why I think what I think."

Structure & Student Integrative Learning Experience Preferences

Participants emphasized the extent to which independently-made connections influence effectiveness of integrative learning. Respondents also highlighted the importance of drawing meaningful connections between course material and personal experiences, academically and professionally.

- "It would be better to be independently making the connections with integrative learning rather than being in a bundle class because I feel if you are in the bundle you'd be handed the information saying, 'yes these two things go together,' instead of creating your own personal opinion."
- "It was rewarding for me to be able to make those connections...it's a really good reward for someone to actually figure that out on their own...instead of the professor saying, 'this is what you should be doing.'"
- "If you're able to pull something from a different class, whether it's right or wrong, it's still effective integrative learning because you are able to make connections between things on your own. I don't think it's most important that the instructor be involved in all of the disciplines because it's more the ability to make the connections."

Suggestions for Future Research

- Scholarship of teaching and learning research should further investigate student and faculty understandings of IL. Perception of the prescriptive nature of IL as unique to bundles and the need for faculty pedigree in disciplines between which students make connections should be studied.
- Continued assessment of IL at UWEC should include examination of autonomous student connections between courses that incorporate IL rubric assessment and other courses in which they are enrolled. Investigating IL in course formats and with populations beyond first-year only or bundle course offerings should also be explored.

