

Chapter 16

Project Learning, the Linked Course, and Ramifications for Global Research

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ABSTRACT

In a regionally accredited urban university, high risk students enrolled in a freshman English course are simultaneously enrolled in a freshman level computer information systems class where project learning is taking place. This linkage allows faculty for both courses to design course instructional objectives which will complement what students are learning in the other linkage course as well as cover the objectives of their respective discipline's course.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The regionally accredited urban university which is the setting for this case is located in the center of downtown in a large metropolitan area located in the southwestern part of the country. The commuter university is an open admissions institution with over twelve thousand students. The university is recognized for its diversity. Students vary from traditional high school graduates to less traditional students who are working with families to support. Less than 40 years in existence, the university is a majority minority institution with Hispanic, Black, and Asian students comprising the majority. The

university has numerous majors, masters programs, and is one of the fastest growing universities in the state.

SETTING THE STAGE

The university requires all students enrolled in a degree seeking program to include in their studies a general education core curriculum. This core curriculum includes courses such as: English, history, government, computer literacy, sciences, psychology, math, and more. The courses linked and described in this case, were two of these required general education core curriculum courses: the second semester freshman English course and the

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computer literacy course. The two faculty teaching these courses have worked together teaching this linkage for several semesters. The English faculty member routinely teaches the second semester freshman English course as well as upper division and graduate English courses where computer skills are required for successful research projects. The computer literacy faculty member routinely teaches the computer literacy classes and upper division computer information systems courses. Each has numerous years of experience in their respective disciplines.

In a regionally accredited urban university, high risk students enrolled in a freshman level, second semester English course are simultaneously enrolled in a freshman level computer information systems class where project learning is taking place. This linkage allows faculty to design course instructional objectives which will complement what students are learning in the other linkage course as well as cover the objectives of each course. In the English course portion of the linkage, topics such as public policy and the problems of the global megalopolis; issues of transportation, health, housing, clean air and water in the most populated cities of the world, and poverty and the nation state are just some of the themes used to aid the student who is learning to do research in library databases on the web, think tanks, world organizations such as the World Health Organization, The United Nations, On-line publications like the Country books available from the CIA, and Think Tank consolidators like Docuticker (<http://www.docuticker.com>.) The scholarly elements of the World Wide Web are used to investigate world wide issues and solve global problems using global research.

In the computer information systems portion of the linkage, basic computer literacy topics are covered and then students utilize HTML to develop web pages that present research results for an online presentation, word processing and presentation software are used to fully explore the presentation of research conducted for the English

linkage course, spreadsheet software is used as an analytical tool to examine and graphically present the results, and database software is used to provide an organized way to store results.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The linked courses described in this case were initially established as a teaching model within the Learners' Community which was launched by the university under the auspices of the freshman year experience and the Dean of the University College. Numerous linkages were introduced. Faculty from different disciplines within different colleges were paired to more efficiently blend and provide a wider array of skills and knowledge areas to enhance the learning experience. The university continues to support this effort because of the success that students have demonstrated after they have participated in these linkages.

As a model for global research, the linked course serves as an excellent example of what can happen when two educators in diverse disciplines work together to blend, syncretize, and synergize the learning experience. Rimmington, O'Reilly & Gibson (2003) made it clear that "global learning is best achieved through project-based or other active approaches to learning by teams of people living in countries with vastly different cultures ... using modern communication technologies" (pp. 247-248). Learning key competencies enables new populations of student-researchers to see themselves in perhaps a completely new way as they learn at warp speed or at least experience accelerated learning because a classroom world of accelerated learning possibilities of "know where the research is" is provided to them. Building fluency in language is finally so complimentary to building fluency in writing skills.

Students are required to sign up for briefing services on their problem with media companies that offer free briefing services like *The Financial Times* (<http://www.ft.com/home/US>) and *Foreign*

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