

HIGH IMPACT TEACHING PRACTICES IN GENERAL EDUCATION

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GE'S GOAL IS COMPETENCE, NOT CONTENT.

We want students to learn to think critically, communicate clearly, reason analytically, and demonstrate self-awareness in a complex world. These are not things that can be easily taught in a static classroom.

There are a number of ways of teaching general education courses that **improve the competence of the students** by asking them to learn through application.

If a student is not asked to use what is being learned, it will not be used competently.

It is necessary to model behaviors we wish to encourage, and we have to ask them to repeat those behaviors and use that knowledge several times so that they become habit.

1. First-Year Seminars and Experiences

First-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Why?

The desire to know makes learning more efficient. Involvement in research-like activity let's students make discoveries that open them to further learning.

2. Common Intellectual Experiences Addressing the ‘Big Questions’

Common courses or linked courses that address large problems that require interdisciplinary solutions. These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence, cancer, being and transcendence—with a variety of curricular and co-curricular options for students.

Common Intellectual Experiences Addressing the 'Big Questions'

Why?

Because it is easier to learn things in natural relation to one another than to learn them discretely. There is a purpose to knowing and using knowledge.

Mark Damen, USU 1320 History and Civilization

- <http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/1320Hist&Civ/syllabus/CDindex.htm>
- Group Work
- In-Class Discussions
- In-Class Discussion Forms
- Goals and Methods of Discussions

There are 300 students in this class.

3. Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and in all disciplines. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. Asked to explain the subject in writing, the students are learning to summarize, condense, and explain as they practice their communication skills.

Writing-Intensive Courses

Why?

Essential to this concept is the idea of “writing to learn.” Writing to learn does not require that the papers be marked, but that students build their writing skills by frequent repetition in various genres. It presumes that you learn best when you can explain things to yourself and others in writing.

Mark Damen, USU 1320 History and Civilization

- <http://www.usu.edu/markdamen/1320Hist&Civ/syllabus/CDindex.htm>
- A. Papers (5 X 100 pts. each)
- B. Reactions (5 X 50 pts. each)
- D. Capstone (200 pts. maximum)
- There are 300 students in this class.

4. Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning has two goals: learning to work and solve problems with others, and improving one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Why?

Students often hate working in teams. They complain that the labor is unfairly distributed, and they hate being dragged down by the performance of others. But in the real world, learning to take responsibility for common goals is critical, and not every team member will make the same contribution. These exercises are about re-orientating them to the way the world actually does its work, through cooperation and shared responsibility.

5. Undergraduate Research : Learning by Doing

Undergraduate research involves students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, the slog of discovery, and the excitement of understanding. By asking them to use the methods of discovery, they learn how discovery occurs by doing it.

Undergraduate Research : Learning by Doing

Why?

Traditional instruction stresses learning concepts and vocabulary before asking questions. This reverses the process. Asking questions leads to the need to know and understand the concepts and vocabulary in order to answer the questions.

Undergraduate Research : Learning by Doing

(But these projects are hard in disciplines that require preparatory learning, so they may have to have artificial elements, such as the research problem packages that provide data, research articles and other artifacts that can solve a puzzle. In disciplines like history, where access to ancient languages and specialized interpretive skills are needed, research simulations are using data bases containing large collections of translated materials).

6. Learning for Complexity

Students need to explore cultures, and worldviews different from their own. These courses often confront students with “difficult differences,” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles for human rights, freedom, and power, in historical and contemporary contexts. They ask students to understand their own cultural contexts while appreciating those of others.

Learning for Global Engagement

Why?

Courses designed to ensure that students move from the comfort zone of their own assumptions to an understanding how others see the world makes students more thoughtful learners and citizens. Most majors do not do this explicitly, so this is one of the key jobs of general education. In our globalized society we cannot know about all others, but we must be conditioned to ask how others construct their reality ethically and socially. We must be prepared to meet them with an open mind, and be ready to share our reality with them in a constructive way.

Jeannie Johnson, “Strategic Cultures,” POLS 4890

“. . . we forget our history. We forget what didn't work in the past and why. And then repeat the same mistakes. She quotes Sun Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher and general, who said “in the military—knowing the other and knowing oneself, in one hundred battles no danger,” and contends that Americans do not often remember the second part of the adage.”

http://liberalis.usu.edu/2013/summer/when_culture_is_missing.html

7. Experiential Learning

Giving students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum, experiential learning requires students to *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their experiences. In most cases these are based in community action and teach citizenship along with the activity.

Service Learning or Community-Based Learning

Why?

To be an educated person is to assume civic responsibility. Since ancient times education and duty were associated, and we should expect our students to learn the importance and value of civic engagement. In the process they will realize that their knowledge can be applied to all sorts of issues in the civic realm. They will learn that they can be agents of change.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE LAB

The course introduced students to a design-driven process for innovation. Framed within the context of a current design problem the university faces, students were led through the process, ultimately landing on a set of solutions the university could implement to improve their college experience.

<http://www.businessinnovationfactory.com/projects/sxl/portfolio/participatory-design-studio>

http://liberalis.usu.edu/2011/summer/designing_a_better_university.html

- **PARTICIPATORY DESIGN: Re-creating the Student Experience at USU**
- What if we put students in the driver's seat of a new kind of R&D to transform higher education? One that provided a platform for engaging students more fully in a real world effort that also involved faculty, and university administrators? Could we improve a student's education experience? Yes. Could we take it a step further and transform higher education itself? Yes.

8. Capstone Courses and Portfolios

These experiences require students to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," exhibit of artwork, or any other thing that allows them to demonstrate a level of mastery.

Salt Lake Community College ePortfolio

Electronic Portfolios at SLCC

It is now a requirement in all General Education courses for students to create an ePortfolio that contains their significant assignments and reflections about those assignments. The ePortfolio also allows students to document their goals and extra-curricular activities as well as to post their resume.

Salt Lake Community College's ePortfolio initiative is a great way for students to make sense of General Education and share their learning experiences with friends, family, and scholarship committees. Faculty are also going to want to see your ePortfolio before they write a letter of recommendation for you.

<http://www.slcc.edu/gened/eportfolio/index.aspx>

Capstone Courses and Projects

Why?

The effects of General Education, with its breadth of courses, cannot be seen in any single course. A Capstone project expects a student to synthesize learning, apply critical thinking, and demonstrate competence.

THE OUTCOMES

- All of these practices blend together. Used individually and combined, they have the same end. They ask students to practice critical inquiry, clear communication, cultural sensitivity, and citizenship. That is why they are High Impact Practices.