Linked Courses for General Education and Integrative Learning: A Guide for Faculty and Administrators

Soven, Margot; Lehr, Dolores; Naynaha, Siskanna; and Olson, Wendy, eds.
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2013

Book Review

Tags: administration | integrative learning | linked courses | student learning

Reviewed by: Jonathan David Lawrence, *Canisus College*
Date Reviewed: March 5, 2015

Linked Courses for General Education and Integrative Learning explores the use of linked courses to create learning communities for students. While the editors acknowledge a wide range of meanings for these terms and allow contributors to use their own definitions, they focus on "two courses linked across the curriculum" as the most common form of learning communities (ix). They suggest that such linked courses are important in engaging students with the "complexity and interdependence" of fields of knowledge. The book examines the use of linked courses at different institutions, strategies in implementing and assessing these courses, and the results and learning outcomes from these examples.

Instructors in religious studies and theology will likely find two of the chapters particularly useful although the examples of linked courses in other fields also offer suggestions for structures and strategies for linked courses. Chapter 2, "Linked Content Courses: A World Civilizations – World Religions Case Study," by Jeffrey LaMonica, describes a pair of "bundled" courses at Delaware County Community College. The instructors linked the course competencies for the two courses and included several team-taught sessions throughout the term along with assignments that required an interdisciplinary focus. The instructors concluded that the linked structure increased student interest and enthusiasm which can be an important factor in retention. LaMonica also highlights how both courses contributed to common college competencies by reinforcing student learning and highlighting connections between fields.

Chapter 6, "Implementing a Linked Course Requirement in the Core Curriculum" by Margo Soven, describes the "Doubles" program at La Salle University which linked courses for first year students. These linked courses were offered across the curriculum and created a significant administrative challenge, especially when all first-year students were required to participate. Soven discusses many aspects of implementing these courses including staffing, scheduling, training, assessment, and administrative involvement. While there were positive outcomes for both students and faculty, the program was ultimately suspended due to its cost. The college has however attempted to apply the concept to first-year orientation and other programs. While this chapter does not focus specifically on religious studies and theology, its connection to the core curriculum may offer useful ideas for religious studies and theology instructors given the role these departments play in the core at many institutions.

The remaining chapters examine additional aspects of implementing linked courses. Some describe examples of pairing content courses with courses that focus on specific skills such as writing. Others focus on connections to first year experiences or residential learning communities. The final section addresses assessment strategies for linked courses and summarizes the outcomes at several institutions.

In one sense this book is most relevant for faculty at institutions which offer linked courses or are contemplating such programs. However, other readers may find these examples useful as illustrations of ways to make individual courses more interdisciplinary as well or develop team-taught courses or collaborations with other departments. Several of the chapters offer extensive references to further studies and general research in the field which will also be useful to many readers.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/linked-courses-for-general-education-and-integrative-learning-a-guide-for-faculty-and-administrators/