

HOW TO MAKE A PROGRAM OF COORDINATED STUDIES

Background:

In the winter and spring quarters of 1989, I served on one of the task forces preparing the comprehensive Self-Study for the team of outside experts who would be coming in the fall quarter for the fifteen-year re-accreditation visit to the College. My team was led by Dean Matt Smith, who directed us to investigate the extent to which the academic program of the college was fulfilling the institutional goals known as the "Five Foci." It was my task to evaluate our commitment to Interdisciplinary Study.

I examined how our group learning contracts and even some individual learning contracts crossed conventional disciplinary boundaries in the study of problems and themes or to work upon research and creative projects, but I was mainly concerned with the resources which we were devoting to coordinated studies programs. From the recruiting of the Planning Faculty through the first three decades of Evergreen, these interdisciplinary, team-taught, full-time-responsibility ventures were our "brand" -- the mode of teaching and learning for which we became known nationally and even internationally. Though we remained the lone example of a commitment of the majority of an institutions' resources to such study, some of our practices, usually under the heading of "learning communities," were taken up by other colleges.

Most of my research involved the analysis of all the official program descriptions sent to the Office of the Registrar in 1986-87, 1987-88, and the fall quarter of 1988-89 for inclusion in students' transcripts. I paid attention to the program goals, the backgrounds of the faculty members, the assigned readings, the lists of lectures and other presentations, the component workshops, the kinds of projects undertaken, and the course-equivalencies for the credit awarded -- the translations into the conventional terminology of departments and divisions. When I had doubts about my understanding of what had gone on in programs, I turned to members of the faculty teams for clarification.

To the task of interpreting the data, I brought my own experience with

coordinated studies. As one of the three and then four academic deans, I had participated in the process of reviewing and deciding upon all the programs proposed for 1971-72 through 1975-76. In the first four of those years, I oversaw the activities and evaluated the performances of the faculty members in the programs which constituted my Dean Group. After I moved from the Deans' Office to the faculty, in the next fourteen years I taught in eleven different programs. One of these had a five-faculty team, four had four-faculty teams, three had three-faculty teams, and three had two-faculty teams. Nine of the programs ran for fall-winter-spring academic years. Two ran for only the fall and winter quarters. (The academic deans assumed that these programs would not have enough substance to last for a year and would not retain enrollment; as things turned out, the programs gained enrollment in the winter quarter and could have run for the whole year.)

Though the members of our task force wrote their reports on the commitment of the academic program of the college to the Five Foci, the deans and directors who served as the writers and editors for the Self-Study decided upon a different organization of material but made use of our findings in preparing the final version. The future historian will find the relevant chapter of that version in the Archives as: "Constancy and Change: a Self-Study Report August 1989 – The Coordinated Studies Program: the Center of Evergreen Practice" (pp. 54-61). The importance of coordinated studies was demonstrated statistically in the Self-Study under the heading "Enrollment Distribution by Mode of Study 1987, 1988:

	1987	1988
Coordinated Studies (% of credit hours)	66.3	54.5
Group Contracts	21.0	31.9
Courses	4.7	4.8
Individual Contracts	8.0	8.9

At the time when I was involved in this exercise, I was thinking often about my most recent experiences in "Introduction to the Performing Arts" of 1986-87 and my current work in "Reflections of Nature," 1988-89. Though quite different in the themes to be studied and the methods used, each program amounted to a good example of its type.

To the former, the coordinator, Bernard Johansen brought his experience as a dancer, choreographer, and theater director; Ingram Marshall brought his experience as a composer, performer, and music theorist; I contributed my knowledge of dramatic literature and experience as a musician and actor. We were assisted by Edward Trujillo, Building Manager of the Communications Laboratory, who participated in some presentations and coached a workshop in acting and directing.

Instead of simply taking turns with works of our several arts, we conceived of multi-week blocks in which the program would deal with themes treated in these arts. Examples were: (1) Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* >> dramatized by John van Druten and read as *I Am a Camera* >> viewed in filmed version *I Am a Camera* >> viewed and studied in film version of music-theater transformation into Ebb's & Kander's *Cabaret* (a stage production of which Bud Johansen had directed); (2) Dubose Heyward's novel *Porgy* >> dramatized by Dubose and Dorothy Heyward as *Porgy and Bess* >> transformed into opera *Porgy and Bess* by George and Ira Gershwin and Dubose Heyward (a production of which the whole program witnessed in Seattle) >> many jazz recordings of songs from the opera; and so on. As an interdisciplinary venture, the program was intensive, staying mainly within the Expressive Arts, though it included critical interpretation and historical issues which took us into the Humanities.

The latter program, "Reflections of Nature," was extensive, not only interdisciplinary but also interdivisional. The coordinator, Rob Knapp, had his official academic background in physics; Jean Mandeberg, in the visual arts; Robert Sluss, in biology; Judy Cushing in philosophy, artificial intelligence, and computer science; I in literature, as well as experience with cultural history and music. In hindsight, it appears that our strategy placed a cluster of processes and

phenomena called "Nature" in the center, as the five of us moved in from our several angles of expertise and concern, assigning readings, devising projects, and participating in one of the most exciting faculty seminars I was to experience at Evergreen. We indeed learned how to learn, and hoped that we would infect our students.

As different as these programs were, they shared one attribute. Their success in large part depended upon the lengthy, energetic, and cordial advanced planning which the designated faculty team put into them. And it is the description of this kind of planning which I included in my contribution to the Self-Study for the benefit of our visitors and which I also shared in those years with several colleagues at other institutions who were curious about what we were doing at Evergreen.

[At the time of this writing, in the summer of 2017, an examination of the 2017-18 offerings in the on-line college catalog indicates that the academic administrators, faculty members, and students have, for the most part, lost interest in coordinated studies. The term itself has been abandoned in favor of the simple designation "programs." There is little evidence to indicate that the principles and practices of the past – especially with regard to unified responsibility, coherent interdisciplinary investigations, and concentrated rather than diffused effort – are still in force. The mode of study is much diminished in numbers, size, and length of offerings. But perhaps these developments make it all the more important to call the attention of a future historian of the College to what was for some three decades the most distinctive feature of its curriculum.]

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I. The Early Discussions

A. Two (or more) faculty members talk about a problem which concerns them as thinkers and teachers.

B. They explore it from their backgrounds and awareness of the concerns of

students who might wish to work with them.

C. At program-planning time, looking at the deans' priorities for numbers and kinds of new programs and at the needs for representing their specialty planning areas in staffing various kinds of programs, they decide that the issue would be well worth consideration by a faculty-student team.

D. They start thinking about the kinds of (1) data, (2) theoretical and disciplinary methods, and (3) applications that might give substance and form to the discussions.

E. They take a look – both realistic and hopeful – at what they themselves can bring to the study.

F. They decide what other kinds of expertise they will need and invite another colleague or two to join them, by reason of complementary backgrounds and strong interest in the main problem, issue, or theme. This person or these persons will thereafter participate fully in the planning.

G. The team comes up with a working title, writes up a brief description of the issues to be studied and the methods to be employed, and proposes the program to the academic deans with the approval of the faculty members' specialty areas.

II. Detailed Planning

A. Practicing for the faculty seminar: The team members meet often in the period before the beginning of the program. Usually they will not deal with structural details and explicit content until they have taken turns at bringing in examples of the kinds of things the whole student/faculty team might be working on in the program itself. They get used to talking with each other as inquisitive advanced learners, opening up and sharing their respective disciplinary and personal understandings rather than resting upon their acquisitions and beliefs or hiding behind them. (For the faculty seminar will be the most important meeting of the week; if it works, the whole program will work.)

B. Themes and questions: (1) The faculty planning team lists all the

tributary themes, questions, topics and projects which can be derived from or feed into the central problem or theme. (2) Recognizing the limitations on time and energy and expertise the team decides upon those things which it can treat that it must treat. (3) The team decides upon a ranking of issues so that there will be a few major headings which can subsume some of the other important themes.

C. Over-all schedule: Assuming an eleven-week quarter, the first week will be devoted mainly to orientation and giving people a taste of the main substance of program concerns and faculty interests. Assume that the eleventh week will be reserved for evaluation conferences, an hour for each of the twenty-two students for whom each faculty member has been seminar-leader. It might then seem logical to divide the nine weeks at the heart of the quarter into blocks of some sort.

D. Weekly schedule: The faculty team works out the combination of seminar meetings, lectures and other presentations, workshops, fieldwork, and office hours. It must be clear about what kinds of rooms, equipment, and staff support will be necessary.

E. Content of books, lectures, other presentations, workshops, field-work and other types of projects: Here again, one first indulges in sky's-the-limit listing of everything which the faculty team could do and ought to do. But then, by horse-trading about who gets to assign what central texts to the whole program, the team will settle upon one primary text a week for the nine full weeks. Other topics can be handled in lectures.

III. Fine-Tuning and Other Matters

A. The students' share: No matter how carefully the faculty members work out the schedules and readings and exercises in advance, much of whatever success the program has will depend upon the particular combination of talents and concerns which the students bring to it. If a program is planned for advanced students, and accepted for offering a year before it starts running, then the designated faculty members should start talking to interested students during the

year and listen hard to their suggestions. If it is designed for freshmen but to run for a year, then the students should be encouraged in the winter quarter to help the faculty plan for the spring. Even if it is planned only to accommodate freshmen in the spring quarter, the designated faculty team should start recruiting them in the fall and bring them into planning discussions in the winter.

B. Texts: Remember that you will not be relying upon "textbooks" which survey the ground rapidly in entire fields. Perhaps a few standard textbooks may be useful as back-ups, to be read a bit at a time and discussed in question periods during whole-group sessions. But they will not do for seminars. The main reading of each week should be in primary sources – books and articles, stories and poems, about which one can have opinions, which spur one to agreement or disagreement and to further thinking. Please remember that in coordinated studies we read whole works one at a time rather than sections of three or four course- text-books concurrently. The emphasis must be on quality rather than quantity, on depth rather than on coverage. And the books – though they had better be good ones – will be chosen not to make up a sacred canon but because the common enterprise requires such thinking and artistry.

C. Papers and other assignments: Some coordinated studies programs ask for brief "response-essays" to be brought and contributed to the seminars as evidence of the students' growing abilities to be able to engage texts on their own initiative and figure out what is worth discussing. On occasion the "response-essays" should come after the lectures and seminars of the week and demonstrate the ability to arrive at reasoned conclusions. Other programs will rely less on weekly papers to be submitted to the instructors and will emphasize journals which students keep primarily for themselves but show to their instructors. Still others encourage both the writing of brief weekly papers and the keeping of journals or" program notebooks." Whichever way one approaches it, the emphasis should be upon developing the students' own responsibility for figuring out what is worth discussing. Most programs will also assume that the students will identify early in the term projects of their own which they wish to develop and the results of which they will present to the whole program toward the conclusion of their common enterprise.