

Integrator Courses

As part of the common core curriculum of the Schools of Liberal Arts and Science, each student is required to take an integrator course during her/his junior or senior year of study. These courses are intended to demonstrate that the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences are interrelated and independent. They should use interdisciplinary approaches to address important topics of contemporary relevance to our students. In particular, they should enable our students to understand these topics, at a basic level, from at least two diverse perspectives.

Designing and teaching integrator course requires collaboration between faculty members from different disciplines and/or schools. This collaboration may encourage further collaboration, in teaching or research, across academic boundaries.

The Common Core Curriculum Committee proposes the following operational description of junior/senior integrator courses. This description is based partly on the description of the nature and philosophy of these courses that appears in "A Principled Curriculum" (Spring 1998) and partly on our practical experience with these courses.

We begin by presenting a description of an ideal integrator course, as a model for actual integrator courses. We recognize that it may not always be possible for actual courses to match the ideal course in all respects. Consequently, we also present a list of minimum requirements for integrator courses. We conclude this document by presenting some recommendations for the management and administration of the courses.

The ideal course:

An integrator course should address important topics, of general interest, that have contemporary relevance to our students. Ideally, it should confront its topics from a variety of different perspectives: scientific, ethical, religious, political, economic, cultural, etc. Examples of possible topics include the origins of the universe or the origins of life, global warming, the evolution and determination of human intelligence, government policy towards human reproduction, the nature of race and racial differences, discrimination and affirmative action, AIDS and other threats to global health, the biology and ethics of cloning, and the sources of individual and national economic success.

The ideal integrator course would include substantial elements from all three areas represented in the Schools of Liberal Arts and Science: humanities, social science, and natural science. It would be developed by a team consisting of instructors from all three areas. The members of this team would share the primary responsibility for teaching the course, although other instructors and/or guest lecturers might participate. The course would be taught in a way that acquainted students with the similarities and differences in the perspectives, approaches and methods that scholars from these three areas use to study particular topics. Each course would have a substantial writing component as an integral part of the curriculum. Students would be encouraged to choose topics for their writing assignments that were connected to their majors.

Minimum requirements for an integrator course:

- The course must include substantial elements from at least two of the three areas (humanities, social science, natural science). Explicit study of the differences in the methods used by scholars in these areas is encouraged, but not required.
- Under normal circumstances, faculty from at least two of the three areas must participate in developing the course.¹ (Course development may include revising an existing course to convert it into an integrator course.)
- Although team-teaching is encouraged, a particular section of the course can be taught by a single instructor. In cases of this type, participation by guest lecturers from other areas is very strongly encouraged.
- The course can include elements and instructors from schools outside Liberal Arts and Science. However, the course must be based in the Schools of Liberal Arts or Science, and at least one of the principal instructors must be from one of these schools.
- The course must have a substantial writing component that is well-integrated into the curriculum (see the ideal-course description).
- The course can be based on an existing course offered within a department, provided the existing course is augmented, if necessary, in a way that satisfies the above requirements.
- The course must be approved, as an integrator course, by the Common Core Curriculum Committee.

Administrative recommendations:

- Normally, enrollment in an integrator course should be limited to 25 students. The instructor(s) should have the option of waiving this limit. However, the initiative for the waiver should come from the instructor(s).
- Although students should be encouraged to take integrators taught by instructors outside their majors, they should not be required to do so.
- Significant funds should be earmarked by the two schools and/or the university, on a continuing basis, to support the development and offering of integrator courses. These funds could be used to support the development of new courses or the redesign of existing courses (see above). The recipients(s) of these funds should be asked to make a commitment to offer the course at least three times.

¹ It may be possible, in some cases, for a course to be developed by a single instructor. In these cases, faculty from other areas must have some role in teaching the course.

- If a course is taught by a single instructor, then the person teaching the course should receive full credit for it, and the credit hours should be attributed to that instructor's department.
- If a course is team-taught, then the first time it is offered two members of the team should receive credit for teaching a full course. Thereafter, credit can be split; alternatively, one member of the team can be designated by the team as the primary instructor and receive credit for teaching a full course. (The members of the team may, if they wish, develop their own formula, along these lines, for dividing the course credit.) If a team-taught course has unusually high enrollment – more than 50 students – then two instructors should receive full credit for the course each time it is offered.
- The first time a course is team-taught, the credit hours should be split between the departments of two of the instructors. Thereafter, the credit hours can continue to be split; alternatively, all the hours can be attributed to a primary instructor.