Final report: Review of the Integrative Seminar course in the context of Writing in the Disciplines

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The Ministry demands an integration of scholarship from at least two different Social Science disciplines in IS, though does not dictate how to accomplish this. At Dawson a strong inherited tradition has affirmed a false assumption that students *must* write three separate discipline sub-sections. These three sub-sections are then supposed to be revised to form a final integrated paper.

Some teachers find success with this 3-discipline paper approach, but many do not. Based on question five in our *Brief Survey Do you have any concerns or suggestions for the IS* , we have found that 57% of teachers

> new classroom learning. Later, significant knowledge within individual disciplines serves as the foundation, but integrative learning goes beyond academic boundaries. Indeed, integrative experiences often occur as learning addresses real-world problems, unscripted and sufficiently broad, to require multiple areas of knowledge and multiple modes of inquiry, offering multiple solutions and benefitting from multiple perspectives. Integrative learning also involves internal changes to the learner.

The AACU offers five different ways of thinking about integration for a college and university population. Students can achieve benchmark, milestone or capstone levels. We think Capstone achievement might be more for university level, but certainly Milestone 3 criteria are attainable to most of our Social Science students. Let's review the 5 AACU Milestone 3 criteria for integration and provide a comment on how each criterion can be addressed in IS.

i) **Connections to Experience**: Effectively selects and develops examples of life experiences, drawn from a variety of contexts (e.g. family life, artistic participation, civic involvement, work experience), to illuminate concepts/theories/frameworks of fields of study.

And

ii) **Reflection and Assessment**: Evaluates changes in own learning over time, recognizing complex contextual factors (e.g., works with ambiguity and risk, deals with frustration, considers ethical frameworks).

These two criteria seem to parallel nicely the two reflection assignments required in IS, and as we learn more about the scholarship on integration, we suspect many teachers would appreciate help developing these assignments to better meet these criteria for integration.

The other three criteria seem to have the most application to the writing of the research paper. Let's look at each one separately.

iii) **Connections to Disciplines**: Independently connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective**.**

This criterion speaks directly to discipline-based integration, but the term discipline is broadened to include *perspectives*. So how does focusing on perspectives affect IS? Simple. If we start with a general topic and instruct our students to explore it using 3-disciplines, this is not always a meaningful challenge to the student and can lead to awkward and choppy final papers. Instead, if we start with a challenging problem, one the students can sink their teeth into, we will increase student engagement. And the problem and its various aspects drive the search for a variety of disciplinary perspectives in order to answer it effectively. The problem seeks the disciplines rather than the opposite. One teacher noted:

> *nice to have a centralized list of IS projects that instructors use for IS, so we*
>
> *problem-based approach to the project, and I have to say I much prefer the*

-skill for students to know how their work can be applicable and usable in real life. I just wished I had some more examples of these kinds of problem-

Shifting from TOPIC to PROBLEM may seem like a small step, but this approach typically yields better critical thinking and is highly recommended in the educational literature (e.g., Beaufort, 2007).

iv) **Transfer**: Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to solve problems or explore issues.

There are many ways this criterion can be met in IS. Let's look at just one example. One respondent from the *Brief Survey* wrote:
academic source versus using a se
requirement.

This last quote touches on an issue that IS teachers might find revealing: Rather than simply concerning ourselves with the number of academic sources used, or if the source is considered a primary, secondary, or tertiary source, we could get more mileage if students better understood the differing functions of sources (viz., Background, Exhibits, Argument, and Method) and how to apply different sources into scholarly research based on purpose of source (Bizup, 2008). The development of this skill should begin in RM – certainly well before students arrive at IS, at which point they should be able to transfer this skill to their IS project.

v) **Integrated Communication**: Fulfills the assignment(s) by choosing a format, language, or graph (or other visual representation) to explicitly connect content and form, demonstrating awareness of purpose and audience.

Below is an example of how, after taking a brief WID summer workshop last year, our colleagea and D s(ising a

This approach echoes suggestions by Beaufort (2007). You can see how just giving students a purpose and an audience can be motivating. And isn't this more realistic in terms of the kinds of papers we, professionals in our fields, write?

There is a well-established body of scholarship that offers solutions on how to achieve integration when writing research papers. The examples we provided above only touch upon the possibilities that can be explored in making IS a more engaging, meaningful and integrative course. We can (and should!) maintain a connection to disciplines, but we believe the IS experience will be dramatically improved for students and teachers if a more comprehensive notion of integration is appreciated and woven into the design of the course.

B. MORE EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR PRODUCING A SATISFYING STUDENT PAPER

Our report would be incomplete if we didn't address an ongoing complaint made by many IS teachers: the heavy grading workload. Some quotes from the *Brief Survey*:

One resource we have found particularly useful is Bean's (2011) *Engaging Ideas: The earning in the Classroom*. Bean (2011) has many ideas related to course design and providing feedback which result

Appendix A

Appendix B
Brief Survey of Integrative Seminar

The following questions shouldn't take you more than a few minutes to complete.

As stated in the Rules and Templates there are different models to structure the IS course. The purpose of the following brief and anonymous survey is to find out how teachers approach IS. Your participation is very much appreciated.

1. Have you taught IS before? Yes No

2. Do you teach it regularly (eg., at least once every two years or so)? Yes No

3. Before the submission of the final paper do you require:
   a. Separate discipline papers (for example: History, Sociology, Psychology, etc.)
   b. Separate aspect papers (for example: themes from an International Law IS such as: "Who suffers?" "Who benefits?" "What are the roots of exploitation?" and "What are the factors behind the lack of implementation of International Laws?")
   c. Complete rough drafts with no separate discipline or aspect papers beforehand
   d. Other (please specify below if you use a combination of the above approaches, or a completely different approach)

If you selected 'other' from above or wish to comment more on the process you use, please feel free to do so:

4. What does "Integrative" mean to you?

5. Do you have any concerns about or suggestions for the IS course?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix C

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can by shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.

Fostering students' abilities to integrate learning—across courses, over time, and between campus and community life—is one of the most important goals and challenges for higher education. Initially, students connect previous learning to new classroom learning. Later, significant knowledge within individual disciplines serves as the foundation, but integrative learning goes beyond academic boundaries. Indeed, integrative experiences often occur as learners address real-world problems, unscripted and sufficiently broad, to require multiple areas of knowledge and multiple modes of inquiry, offering multiple solutions and benefiting from multiple perspectives. Integrative learning also involves internal changes in the learner. These internal changes, which indicate growth as a confident, lifelong learner,

accounting, engineering, or chemistry) also involve the kinds of complex and integrative constructions (e.g., ethical dilemmas and social consciousness) that seem to be highlighted so extensively in self reflection in arts and humanities, but they may be embedded in individual performances and less evident. The key in the development of such work samples or collections of work will be in designing structures that include artifacts and reflective writing or feedback that support students' examination of their learning and give evidence that, as graduates, they will extend their integrative abilities into the challenges of personal, professional, and civic life.

- Academic knowledge: Disciplinary learning; learning from academic study, texts, etc.
- Content: The information conveyed in the work samples or collections of work.
- Contexts: Actual or simulated situations in which a student demonstrates learning outcomes. New and challenging contexts encourage students to stretch beyond their current frames of reference.
- Co-curriculum: A parallel component of the academic curriculum that is in addition to formal classroom (student government, community service, residence hall activities, student organizations, etc.).
- Experience: Learning that takes place in a setting outside of the formal classroom, such as workplace, service learning site, internship site or another.
- Form: The external frameworks in which information and evidence are presented, ranging from choices for particular work sample or collection of works (such as a research paper, PowerPoint, video recording, etc.) to choices in make-up of the eportfolio.
- Performance: A dynamic and sustained act that brings together knowing and doing (creating a painting, solving an experimental design problem, developing a public relations strategy for a business, etc.); performance makes learning observable.
- Reflection: A meta-cognitive act of examining a performance in order to explore its significance and consequences.

Self Assessment: Describing, interpreting, and judging a performance based on stated or implied expectations followed by planning for further learning.

Definition

Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and cocurriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	**Milestones** 3	 2	**Benchmark** 1
Connections to Experience *Connects relevant experience and academic knowledge*	Meaningfully **synthesizes** connections among experiences outside of the formal classroom (including life experiences and academic experiences such as internships and travel abroad) to **deepen understanding** of fields of study and to broaden own points of view.	Effectively **selects and develops** examples of life experiences, drawn from a variety of contexts (e.g., family life, artistic participation, civic involvement, work experience), to **illuminate** concepts/theories/frameworks of fields of study.	**Compares** life experiences and academic knowledge to infer differences, as well as similarities, and **acknowledge perspectives** other than own.	**Identifies** connections between life experiences and those academic texts and ideas **perceived as similar and related** to own interests.
Connections to Discipline *Sees (makes) connections across disciplines, perspectives*	Independently creates wholes out of multiple parts (synthesizes) or draws conclusions by combining examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.	Independently connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.	When prompted, connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.	When prompted, presents examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.
Transfer *Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations*	Adapts and applies, independently, skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations **to solve difficult problems or explore complex issues in original ways.**	Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations **to solve problems or explore issues.**	Uses skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation in a new situation **to contribute to understanding of problems or issues.**	

Appendix D
Selected Academic Sources that informed our Project

AAC&U. (2007-2008). VALUE Rubric Development Project. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics.

Bazerman, Charles. (2009) Genre and Cognitive Development: Beyond Writing to Learn. Retrieved from http://mina.education.ucsb.edu/bazerman/chapters/documents/Bazerman2009ChptrGenreandCognit.pdf.

Bean, John. (2011) *Engaging Ideas: The Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey BasCID 10>BDC BT1 0 0 1 153.