CRITERIA -- SYNTHESIS AREA

SYNTHESIS COURSE -- 3 s.h.

Synthesis is the way in which well understood parts are combined into wholes; it is the capacity to weave many complex strands into a fabric, either recreating a pattern already known or imagining and designing new ones.

The major objectives of the synthesis course are threefold. First, the course ensures that students will have the opportunity to experience a systematic approach to synthetic reasoning, contributing to their ability to think effectively about broad and complex intellectual, social and political issues as seen from multiple perspectives. Second, because the course is taken near the end of the students' undergraduate experiences, it will assure that students experience the enrichment of Liberal Studies across all four years of undergraduate study. Finally, the course will provide students with an opportunity to interact with students from a diversity of disciplines in a context in which they will experience the excitement of expanding their interests collectively across disciplinary lines. The Liberal Studies Committee should encourage course proposals that are inventive, creative, and experimental, and its guiding philosophy should include the willingness to take risks.

CRITERIA FOR SECTIONS OF THE SYNTHESIS COURSE

All sections of the synthesis course must:

(1) Nurture and stimulate, either implicitly or explicitly, the student's ability to think synthetically. In their proposals for sections of the course, instructors must identify the procedures by which this will be accomplished.

(2) Contain challenging intellectual content addressing significant issues. In their proposals for sections of the course, instructors must identify that content and those issues.

(3) View the content from the perspectives and approaches of a minimum of two discrete disciplines. In their proposals for sections of the course, instructors must explain how this objective will be achieved.

(4) Incorporate within its procedures for student evaluation specific methods to ensure that students' synthetic reasoning skills will be evaluated. In their proposals for sections of the course, instructors must identify the means by which this evaluation will be accomplished.

(5) Address the issues of women and minorities whenever possible. In their proposals for sections of the course, instructors must explain how they will do this.

In addition, all sections of the Synthesis course should:

(1) Include a variety of assignments, some of which should be written, designed specifically to encourage the student to synthesize new ideas, approaches, etc. from the material presented.

(2) Ensure, if exams are used as a method of student evaluation, that exams will consist primarily of essay or discussion questions that will evaluate the student's ability to reason by synthesis, rather than by merely recalling content.

(3) Require readings from an assigned list comprised largely of original/primary materials (as opposed to general surveys or conventional texts from a discipline) and representing at least two discrete disciplinary perspectives.

(4) Assure the widest possible use of available resources; these could include guest lectures, films, audio and video tapes, field trips, and the experiences and perspectives of the students themselves.

(5) Normally, impose no course prerequisites.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LIBERAL STUDIES COMMITTEE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SYNTHESIS COURSE

The committee of students, faculty, and administrators convened to draft criteria for the synthesis course recommends the following:

(1) Because teaching methods and other factors which affect optimal class size may vary considerably among synthesis sections, the university should establish and maintain appropriate enrollments for individual synthesis sections in a manner sensitive to these needs.

(2) Students will not be permitted to take the synthesis course prior to the second semester of their junior year (standing determined by semester hours completed).

(3) In order to broaden their experiences, students should be encouraged to enroll in synthesis course sections taught by instructors outside of the students' major fields.

(4) When and if the Liberal Studies Committee is confident that sufficient resources are available, it should consider identifying the synthesis course as a "repeatable" multiple enrollment course. Thereby, students would be permitted to register for additional sections as free electives, but not to fulfill credit requirements in any other part of the Liberal Studies program.

(5) Because there is no guarantee that the same discrete section of the synthesis course taught by the same faculty member will be offered on a regular basis, students shall be permitted to register for any section of the synthesis course in order to complete a D/F repeat. The Liberal Studies Committee should take actions

to ensure that students are aware of this provision.

(6) Transfer credits from another institution may not be granted to satisfy the requirement for this course.

(7) Because this course is unlike any other in the Liberal Studies program, the Liberal Studies Committee should develop a policy for the periodic review of approved discrete sections of the synthesis course.

(8) Proposals for sections of the synthesis course will be considered professor(s)-specific, and any change or addition of professor(s) should be approved by the Liberal Studies Committee.

(9) In order to assure that sufficient numbers of sections are available to meet student demand, the Liberal Studies Committee should work with the administration to explore the faculty reward system (particularly as it relates to standards for tenure, promotion and performance review) in order to find incentives for faculty to become involved in the development of synthesis course sections. Consideration should be given at the outset to the establishment of a category of "teaching grant" funds dedicated exclusively to support the development of synthesis course proposals.

ATTACHMENT
A MODEL FOR THINKING ABOUT THE NATURE
OF SYNTHESIS

Synthesis can take place along a continuum of complexity and sophistication from simple comparisons all the way to the creation of a new whole that integrates knowledge from initially discrete, contrasting or complementary disciplines into a unity which overcomes the inherent limitations of each in its isolation, while it further enlarges the original meaning of each into a new comprehensive meaning. Obviously, this final and fullest sense of synthesis is an ideal toward which synthesis strives, though it may only rarely be reached. Some strategies along this continuum have been outlined below, though no single synthesis course would be asked or expected to attempt all of these.

I.   Initially, though it appears to be so obvious as not to merit attention, the simplest types of unities which a synthesis course might attempt to establish are those achieved by finding similarities. In one variation, two things might be unified by a common relationship to a third—for instance, physics and economics to the scientific method. In another variation, we discover two things are unified because they originate from the same source—for instance, Spanish and French from Latin or Maoism and Leninism from Marxism. Or in a third variation, things are unified because they share a common goal or pursue a common end—for instance, music, poetry, and painting all seek to create beauty.

II.   Another basic strategy of a synthesis course might be to show two or more parallel approaches, perspectives or methods by which a common subject may be examined in discrete disciplines, e.g., a Marxian economist's, a classical philosopher's, and a renaissance monarch's approach to art. What are the often unquestioned assumptions of each? What are the first principles reflectively accepted by each? What is the methodology used by each to understand the phenomenon? This approach is largely comparative and represents synthesis in a very basic and largely implicit sense.

III. At the next level, a synthesis course may examine the approach and perspective of one discipline in order to show some limitations of the approach and perspective of the other, concerning a common subject. For example, a political scientist studying the impact of industrial decline on the political institutions of a steel town might not focus on the anguish experienced by individual unemployed workers in the same way a psychologist might.

IV.   A synthesis course may attempt to integrate aspects of one discipline into the other, without changing the essential character of the first. For example, the course might experiment by attempting to enlarge the scope of literary

analysis by using some of the methodology of analysis in the visual arts. Or, the political scientist mentioned above might employ psychological insights to understand better what was happening to voting patterns.

V. At a still higher level, a synthesis course might ask whether the perspectives and methods of each discipline are irreducible, thereby suggesting that <u>a new model must be found which will integrate the best of each discipline while overcoming many of the shortcomings of both</u>. Is a new model necessary in a given context to satisfy the demands of a comprehensive synthesis?

If the two fields are so radically different in methodology or perspective, can we create a map of the new model showing where one discipline leaves off and the other takes over. For example, how do the methodologies of a factual discipline relate to questions of value typical of a normative discipline (such as ethics or logic) or to questions of value typical of an aesthetic discipline (such as art or music)? Simple description of each can illuminate its limitations while further implying how those limitations may be overcome by the other discipline. Bio-medical methodology may show how genetic engineering may be achieved, but it cannot answer the question, "Ought it to be done."

VI. At the highest level, a synthesis course may ask whether there are disciplines that <u>investigate what another discipline takes for granted</u>, and, in a sense, establish the validity of the assumptions of the first discipline. If so, there could be a hierarchical relationship between discipline A and discipline B, not unlike a set and sub-set relationship, one dealing with broader issues, the other with more specialized issues. For example, physics takes for granted the assumptions of mathematics; mathematics, in turn, may take for granted epistemological questions such as what is knowledge, or what are deductive and inductive reasoning, or what are reality and form? So history may ask, "Why did Caesar cross the Rubicon at that particular time," while philosophy may ask, "What is time?"

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Criteria for Writing-Intensive Courses

IUP is committed to the improvement of student writing skills; therefore, the responsibility for writing must be university wide. This means that writing must be practiced and reinforced throughout the curriculum. Students need to be educated to recognize that writing is a necessary and frequently used skill. Writing assignments must be designed to increase learning by encouraging students to integrate new knowledge with previous knowledge and to teach discipline specific uses of writing.

Courses which develop writing skills are of two types: (1) Writing courses--those that provide direct instruction in writing skills and the process of writing (the two required English composition courses) and (2) Writing-intensive courses--those that have content as their primary focus but also reinforce writing skills by using writing as an integral part of the learning experience. Writing-intensive courses are addressed in criteria which follow.

GOALS FOR WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:

(1) Encourage and reinforce student learning by using writing as a learning tool;

(2) Help students write more effectively;

(3) Prepare students for writing in their careers and in their personal and community lives;

(4) Encourage the promotion of literacy across the university;

(5) Demonstrate IUP's commitment to the promotion of effective writing skills.

CRITERIA FOR WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES

The following practices are characteristics of writing intensive courses to be encouraged:

In designing writing-intensive courses, departments are urged to be creative and to modify/design courses which are both faithful to the university-wide criteria and reflective of the differences among fields of study. Faculty are urged to determine the number of papers or words (specific number and kinds of writing assignments), grading scales, and teaching strategies appropriate for individual writing-intensive courses.

(1) Reinforcing good writing habits by means of carefully planned writing assignments with clearly defined stages of preparation and regular progress reviews.

(2) Distributing major assignments to the students in writing.

(3) Emphasizing both the process and the product of writing. Writing, both in and out of class, should be used as a tool for learning; this should involve peer input and revision.

(4) Providing ample opportunities for students to practice their writing skills and to have at least 5000 words (approximately 20 typed pages) comprising two or more separate assignments evaluated by an instructor; depending on the nature of the course, appropriate writing assignments may include such formats as case studies, laboratory reports, journals, letters, memos, formal essays, research articles, project or grant proposals, and so forth.

(5) Providing opportunities for students to consult with instructors and perhaps tutors or one another as they prepare drafts of assignments or revisions.

(6) Instructing students how to conceive, organize, and present material in ways appropriate to the subject being studied.

(7) Including ungraded writing.

(8) Providing rationales for all writing assignments based on course objectives.

(9) Considering the quality of written assignments as a significant part of the final grade. (In most cases this should be 50% or more; however, in some instances the amount might be adjusted according to the need of the discipline.)

The following practices are deemed contrary to the spirit of writing-intensive courses.

(1) Offering a proficiency exam (such as CLEP) or a thesis in lieu of a writing-intensive course.

(2) Offering only short answer or multiple choice exams.

(3) Requiring a single writing assignment (such as a term paper), particularly where the writing process has not been carefully monitored throughout the semester.

(4) Requiring only in-class or only out-of-class writing.

(5) Requiring that instructors grade/respond to all writing assignments.

(6) Discouraging student-teacher conferences.

(7) Requiring writing of one specific type only.

--ATTACHMENT--

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES

(1) Students must complete two writing-intensive courses, at least one of which must be in their major field.

[Note: "major field" need not be interpreted in the narrow sense of "major program" nor need it mean "major department"; closely allied departments, programs or disciplines might wish to present such a course collaboratively or to make arrangements for their majors to schedule a writing-intensive course in an allied department, program or discipline.]

(2) After discussion with academic departments and other involved areas of the university, the Liberal Studies Committee should consider carefully the relationship between the writing-intensive courses and the two required composition courses, and provide guidance on the appropriate sequence and placement of writing-intensive courses within a student's course of study..

(3) Courses at the 100, 200, 300, or 400 level may be writing-intensive courses.

(4) Workshops should be conducted on a continuing basis for faculty members teaching writing-intensive courses.

(5) Because class size is a critical factor for a successful writing-intensive course, the university must take particular care in determining and maintaining appropriate enrollments for writing-intensive courses or sections.

(6) Some sections of multiple-section courses may be designated as writing-intensive without all sections being so designated.

(7) Expansion of the Writing Center facilities on all three campuses should be encouraged.

(8) Sufficient sections of the first English composition course must be offered so that it can be completed during the students' first year.

(9) Workshops will be provided for faculty proposing syllabi for writing-intensive courses/sections.

(10) Writing-intensive courses/sections will be designated with a "W" on scheduling information, transcripts, and other appropriate materials.

March 22, 1988

Dr. John D. Welty
President
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
201 Sutton Hall

Dear Dr. Welty:

Please find attached the Liberal Studies criteria relating to the
Synthesis Course and to Writing-intensive courses. This is a revised
version prepared by the Task Force on General Education after
considering the responses which it received to a version circulated
earlier. These last two sets of Criteria will now be submitted to the
University-wide Undergraduate Curriculum Committee for its action.

This completes the work which you charged the Task Force on General
Education with doing. Its report "Liberal Studies at IUP" was adopted
by the University Senate last May; this year it has worked with other
members of the IUP community to draft criteria which are now moving
through the Senate. Since it has no more work to do, and since a
Liberal Studies Committee is now in place to oversee the implementation
of the program, the Task Force on General Education voted at its March
14 meeting to ask that you accept this as our final report and dissolve
us as a group.

We would like to say that, although the job turned out to be longer and
more complicated than perhaps any of us anticipated, we found the work
fulfilling, and we thank you for giving us the opportunity to play an
important role in reshaping undergraduate education here at IUP.

Sincerely,

Arlo D. Davis

Charles D. Cashdollar
Chairpersons
Task Force on General Education

CDC:mlm

Attachments

cc: Hilda Richards, Provost
      Task Force on General Education