A MODEL FOR LINKING INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES USING MINIMAL ADDITIONAL PREPARATION TIME

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Keywords: *Learning Communities, Interdisciplinary, Cluster Courses, Philosophy, Theology*

Abstract

I have developed a hypothetical model for maximizing student learning within the format of linked interdisciplinary courses. I claim that such courses can enhance student engagement, and hence learning, especially if the following model is adhered to: Course linking is multi-layered, and the various layers can be understood hierarchically. The most important layers are the most overarching to the courses and are also most crucial for overall student learning. Successful integration depends on the prioritization of the most important layers, along with not neglecting the lowest layers. It can be time-consuming and must be planned and executed carefully, but as I will show, there is a way of doing this that adds minimal preparation time. By reflecting on my successes and failures, including at least one linked assignment (which happened to be an experiential excursion project), I will show that my model is feasible, worth attempting, and also worth improving upon. Further, it is my hope that the following hypotheses become the basis for a properly data-driven study and also that educators in a wide variety of disciplines find them compelling.

I. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND, CENTRAL QUESTION, THESIS, AND METHODOLOGY[1]

Though the term "interdisciplinary" has already become a well-known buzzword on most university campuses, phrases like "linked courses" or "cluster courses" may be received with perplexity by some. A linked course is one that is either implicitly or explicitly connected with or paired with another course, and both are taken by the same students.[2] Obviously, prerequisite courses are linked to those for which

[1] I would like to begin by thanking the Office of Teaching and Learning at Bridgewater State University for the generous Summer Institute grant that enabled me to develop this project into a publishable essay. Without this extra support, this essay would not have come to be. I am also very grateful for the helpful anonymous comments given on this paper.

[2] J. Gould defines a linked course as "two or more courses . . . taught to the same group of students . . . but faculty do not team-teach or physically integrate their classrooms." He explains that "there are some topics, readings, and assignments that are coordinated to develop a common theme," faculty "intentionally foster connections between the courses, and classes are often taught back-to-back in order to make a coherent schedule," and "faculty plan collaboratively but teach separately." From "Integrating Philosophy Courses in Learning Community Formats," by J. Gould, 2007, *Teaching Philosophy*, 30, p. 310-311. Copyright 2007 by the Philosophy Documentation Center.

A. Auman and J. Lillie refer to this as a "team coordinated model." From "An Evaluation of Team Teaching Models in a Media Convergence Curriculum," by A. Auman and J. Lillie, 2008, *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, p. 362. Copyright 2008 by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. M. Baxter argues for the adoption of an "Extensible Linked Courses Model" in which two or more courses are linked through their themes, as well as through their relationship with other departments and resources. From "Reconceptualizing the Linked Courses Model," by M. Baxter, 2008, *AACE Journal*, 16, p. 133. Copyright 2008 by the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

ISSN 1559-9388 (online version), ISSN 1559-9396 (CD-ROM version).

they are preparatory, but less obviously, two or more courses, even from different disciplines, can be designed and/or delivered with the intent of their complementing one another. In some cases, these courses take place at the same time. It is concurrent linked courses on which I am focusing in this paper, and I will be proposing a model by which instructors of such courses can maximize both integration and student engagement, without adding burdensome additional preparation time.

Before setting out to explain my model, I must clarify three things: (A) further background information, focusing on my understanding of learning in relation to integration and engagement, (B) my methodology, and (C) the setting in which my courses took place.

A. Student Learning in Relation to Integration and Engagement

Socrates, as portrayed by Plato, is the archetypal teacher in my estimation. He explains that teaching is not like putting sight into blind eyes, but rather, is a process of provoking and leading the learner to discover truth for herself. (Plato, *Republic* 518b) Furthermore, this process takes place incrementally, ought to be tailored to each learner as much as possible, and largely depends on not only the receptivity of the learner, but also their ability and willingness to engage dialogically with the teacher, the content, and other learners. Plato portrays this engagement as a verbal process mostly involving series of questions and answers, with Socrates usually asking questions and students attempting to provide answers.[3] Occasionally, Socrates will contribute a speech, which may involve audience engagement, and which may also involve examples and/or visual aids.[4] Often, perhaps always, the topic in question is investigated in a way that we would now describe as integrated or multi-disciplinary, in that geometry may be used, for instance, alongside epic poetry, astronomy, and tragedy, to develop the investigation.[5] I will say more about integrative learning and student engagement below, using modern education literature.

B. Methodology

My methodology in this study is largely reflective, in that its empirical basis constitutes mostly my own reflections on my teaching experience. Though I would like to substantiate my reflections with further evidence, and have done so when possible, there are insurmountable limitations in this regard, largely stemming from the fact that I took up this study in earnest *after* having already taught the courses in question. Unsolvable problems arising from this include but are not limited to my not having asked students evaluation questions about: the extent to which the sister courses came up in their work during my course and vice versa, the extent to which the learning community or cohort experience aided or

[3] See Platonic dialogues such as *Apology*, *Republic*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and many others. In my current practice, I do understand engagement as largely a verbal process, though students' written work is also important.

[4] For examples of Socratic speeches, see Socrates' first and second speeches in Plato's *Phaedrus* (237a-257a), or his speech to the jury at his trial, portrayed in Plato's *Apology* (28a-35d). For examples of Socratic visual aids, see for instance the similes of the "Divided Line" and the Cave in Plato's *Republic* (509d-511e and 514a-521c respectively), the image of the chariot and charioteer in the *Phaedrus* (246a-b), as well as the image-rich myths of the afterlife, like those that conclude Plato's *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*.

[5] Socrates' famous conversation with the slave boy in the *Meno* (81e-85e) is an excellent illustration of the use of geometry in an epistemological investigation. It is arguable that Plato has Socrates use geometry, astronomy, and even music theory to discuss metaphysical concepts in the myth of Er from Plato's *Republic*. See chapter 2 of the following for an extensive treatment of this: "Turning the Whole Soul: Platonic Myths of the Afterlife and Their Psychagogic Function," by J. M. Forte, 2016, Doctoral Dissertation, p. 119-134. Retrieved from ProQuest.

detracted from their engagement and learning, and the list goes on. Despite these limitations, I am confident that the following articulation of my proposed model will prove useful to the reader.

Also, though my own reflections on my teaching experiences enabled me to conceive of this model, a full defense of it necessitates a proper study that collects and assesses data from numerous linked courses to discern more accurately the results of shared, overarching themes and content on student learning, as well as shared assignments, and the team approach to student interventions. I hope to take on such a study, perhaps with a partner, in future years.

C. Setting

For three years, I had the privilege of teaching a year-long series of philosophy courses on intellectual history that were to be explicitly linked, in design and delivery, to a writing intensive English course during the fall term and an introductory theology course in the spring. All four of these classes formed the essential coursework for the First Year Experience at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. As such, these classes were tailored to first year students of this private, Catholic university's rigorous undergraduate liberal arts program. Furthermore, students took these courses in learning communities, composed of 15-18 students each.

The university designed this program of study with the intention of increasing first year student engagement, thereby enhancing student learning while improving retention rates. I am not in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of this entire vision, nor is it within the scope of my article-length paper to do so. Rather, as one of the first to attempt to improve my students' engagement by teaching as a member of this program, I made the choice to spend more time and effort than was expected on linking my courses with their counterparts effectively.

In evaluating the approach of my teammates and I, I believe I have developed a theory for maximizing student learning within this format, and one that should save others time in doing similarly. I intend to offer an answer to the question: Can linked, interdisciplinary courses enhance student engagement, and hence, student learning? My answer is that they can, especially if the following model is adhered to: Course linking is multi-layered, and the various layers can be understood hierarchically. The most important layers are the most overarching to the courses and are also most crucial for overall student learning. Successful integration depends on the prioritization of the most important layers, along with not neglecting the lowest layers. It can be time-consuming and must be planned and executed carefully, with sufficient time planned for executing the various layers, but as I will show, there is a way of doing this that adds minimal preparation time. By examining my successes and failures, including at least one linked assignment (which happened to be an experiential excursion project), I will show that my linked course model is feasible, worth attempting, and also worth improving upon.

It is my hope that my claims are compelling to educators in a wide variety of disciplines— not just those in philosophy. Therefore, the following will proceed with that in mind, and will not rely upon discussions specific to philosophy.

II. LEVELS OF INTEGRATION

The Overview of My Linked Courses Model

A. Top Level:

Shared overarching learning goals

B. Middle Level:

i. Subordinate learning goals in common

ii. Specific overlapping content

iii. Specific student issues

C. Low level:

Scheduling and other logistics

Figure 1. The Linked Courses Model

A. Top Level Integration

The highest level above (Shared, Overarching Learning Goals) represents the most important factor in course integration, because it pertains to the entirety of the courses involved.

The lowest level is the least important to integration because it pertains to individual, minor scheduling details of each course, such as assessments, office hours, and joint events like an excursion. Therefore, the levels are structured based on their impact on the whole, **not necessarily their impact on student learning**. For instance, collaborating on specific student issues, like a highly distracted student, is only a relatively minor factor in full integration because an individual student is only one part of the whole. However, when instructors in multiple courses intervene to address the distraction of a student, it can have a profound effect on **that** student's learning—much more so perhaps than the other levels of integration have on that student. Though addressing this student issue might affect the whole learning community to a degree, this effect is not as pronounced on the whole as an overarching theme or even as the theme or topic of a shared course unit.

The learning goal of the highest level is for students to develop their opinions on the overarching theme(s) of the course—even to develop a substantial body of knowledge on the topic(s) or theme(s). Students develop more informed opinions by having formed them in two or more classes explicitly devoted to these matters, and this learning benefit is not just from mere repetition. Also, by learning about a topic or theme from the perspective of multiple disciplines, students explore that topic from multiple angles, and have the opportunity to gain a perspective on it that transcends either of the courses individually.[6] Some possible overarching questions for all three of the courses being taught above

[6] Gould explains that "numerous studies demonstrate that integrated courses provide a rich learning experience for both students and teachers." He adds that student outcomes include improved interest and maturity. Gould explains that linked courses create connected, rather than fragmented knowledge, which results in a deeper, more complex understanding of the world. He writes, "through discovering connections among ideas, hearing different points of view from more than one professor and exploring multiple perspectives students come to embrace intellectual complexity and to develop higher reasoning skills which go beyond simple recall." Furthermore, "rather than just accumulating unrelated bits of knowledge, students create relationships between perspectives and make personal meaning." See Gould, 312.

include: What is truth? What is the good? What is the beautiful? What does it mean to be a human being? The learning goals corresponding to each would be for students to develop their body of thoughts on these lofty questions, the answers to which, though necessarily partial and in constant development, are essential to coming to an understanding of oneself and one's world.

There are many possible university initiatives that could involve such generalized course- linkage, and sometimes, a series of courses could be linked in this way without instructors even being aware of it. For instance, a university could deem any course on non-Western philosophy, as well as all courses on non-Western literature, history, and cultures, as elements of a diversity awareness initiative. An instructor teaching one of those courses need not be aware of the initiative or its goal in order to teach their course, and also contribute to the initiative, effectively. In this way, such overarching shared learning goals are not necessarily intrinsic to the courses they link, and therefore, the linkage these goals provide can often seem superficial and superfluous, at least from the perspective of those participating in individual courses. For this reason, it is important for instructors to remain mindful of their courses' overarching themes, for the purpose of leading students effectively to see the broader context to which course content pertains. If this is done well, student learning can greatly benefit, according to the literature on this.[7]

Also, without an overarching theme in common, it is difficult to make the claim at all that courses are indeed integrated. Without a common overall purpose, after all, such courses are only linked in part, at best. It is also for this reason, then, that I refer to this level of integration as of a higher order than the rest.

B. Middle Level Integration

Thematic learning goals that do not encompass the entire course, but rather, specific units or ongoing discussions, form the next level (subordinate learning goals, B, i.). See the appendix for examples of overarching and subordinate themes from my linked philosophy and theology courses. As the diagram there shows, this level of integration can become rather intricate and complex, especially when instructors come together to examine their learning goals as thoroughly as my teaching partner and I did. Here, once again, the goal of this linkage in learning goals is that students further develop their thoughts on these themes when approached in multiple classes, from the perspectives of multiple disciplines.

Donald Hatcher reports on a lengthy longitudinal study of freshman to senior gains in critical thinking, that the data supports the position that an integrated approach is preferable. See "Stand Alone Versus Integrated Critical Thinking Courses," by D. Hatcher, 2006, *Journal of General Education* 55, p. 248. Copyright 2006 by Penn State University Press.

Martin Kutnowski reports on his own experience of course integration, that students gained a new perspective on the "value of collaboration the connections between disciplines." From "This is Why We Teach: Igniting a Passion for Learning in Linked Courses," by M. Kutnowski, 2005, *About Campus*, p. 26. Copyright 2005 by Jossey-Bass.

For the skeptic who might say that all learning is inherently integrative, I suggest considering Huber, et al, who explain that when educators give integrative learning special attention, they're usually talking about "larger leaps of imagination—about linking ideas and domains that are not easily or typically connected." "The most promising initiatives for integrative learning are about finding strategic points of connection." From "Leading Initiatives for Integrative Learning," by Huber, Hutchings, Gale, Miller, and Breen, 2007, *Liberal Education* 93, p. 46. Copyright 2007 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

[7] In addition to the evidence above, Sandra Mahoney and Jon Schamber explain that according to the Department of Labor, Americans must contextualize their work. The ability to incorporate "broad points of view is . . . highly desired by employers." Integrative learning, therefore, can greatly help students to become more employable. From "Integrative and Deep Learning Through a Learning Community: A Process View of Self," by Mahoney and Schamber, 2011, *The Journal of General Education* 60, p. 236. Copyright 2011 by Penn State University Press.

The next level down (B, ii.) is reserved for overlapping or shared course content. For instance, students in Philosophy 201 and English 101 learned about identifying informal fallacies. Students in all three courses learned about Homer's *Odyssey* throughout the year. Not only is specific course content usually less influential on the whole of the learning community than the themes of course units or of ongoing discussions, but this content is much less important for this particular cohort of students to learn than the skills and knowledge involved in developing their thoughts on shared themes or questions. Why? Reading Homer's *Odyssey* is a means to the end of developing students' thoughts about justice, or perhaps the beauty of the written word, et cetera. As such, the particular content of that text is less important to student learning than the theme or question to which it is related. That content is also less important to the learning efforts of the community than the aforementioned themes.[8] The subordination of the specifics of content (i.e., the details of the Allegory of the Cave, and its function in the *Republic*) to the ideas developed in that content (i.e., the philosophical significance of the cave allegory) is something easily forgotten in the effort not to fall behind on one's syllabus. Keeping in mind the hierarchy of my levels of integration then, can help instructors avoid this common teaching pitfall. Also, avoiding this common pitfall can help teachers better lead students to middle and top level shares themes.

My teaching team and I had very little time to meet and plan our collaboration on a day-to-day basis. Nor did we share class sessions except on one occasion. Fortunately, the levels of integration described above do not require intensive, regular planning when instructors are not sharing class time. When co-teaching class sessions, much effort must be devoted to planning equally shared time and complementary themes and content, which can be very difficult to do.[9]

When not teaching at the same time and in the same space, though some effort must be put forth to ensure that lessons and units are complementing one another, instructors need not engage in the sort of detailed logistical planning of team-teachers sharing the same class session. There is quite a body of literature on the pros and cons of team-teaching courses and even class sessions, with a great deal of it focusing on the work involved in planning and executing sessions, negotiating how content will be discussed and why, managing differences of opinion and differences in teaching style, and so on.[10] Though I am not arguing against team-taught courses or class sessions, I would like to point out that one

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[8] Focusing on specifics of content, rather than on its themes and broader significance, can result in overemphasizing student memorization and recall, which really amounts to information gathering, and not learning, unless the details to be memorized are used in grappling with broader ideas that are meaningful to students' lives.

As James Davis explains, referring to Bloom's taxonomy, knowledge of specifics is ground level, while knowledge of universals and abstractions is of a higher order. Comprehending that knowledge is higher still. See Davis, 53. Davis creates a model for linked courses that is hierarchical like mine, except based on a close correspondence to Bloom's taxonomy. Though Davis' model is very well informed, compelling, and worth considering, I believe it is significantly more difficult to implement than my model. See *Interdisciplinary Courses and Team Teaching*, by J. Davis, 1995, p. 55-61. Copyright 1995 by American Council on Education and Oryx Press.

[9] Wesley Cray and Steven Brown report on their philosophy co-teaching experience, in which they shared class sessions. They explain that preparation time was a challenge, because they decided they needed to prepare each lecture down to the minute so each instructor would have enough time. Each lecture was structured as a debate about atheism versus theism between the two instructors, so they worked out their arguments in advance. The result was 2-4 hours of preparation time for each lecture, plus some time to re-acquaint themselves with the readings. They add that an e-mail format was insufficient for the sort of planning they needed to do, so they needed to meet in person or on the phone. Though preparation time greatly decreased the second time they taught the course, some problems still remained, like the difficulty of agreeing about what to cut from lectures in order to increase discussion time. See "Team-Teaching the Atheism-Theism Debate," by Cray and Brown, 2014, *Teaching Philosophy* 37, p. 470-473. Copyright 2014 by the Philosophy Documentation Center.

[10] See "Team Teaching on a Shoestring Budget," by J. Ford and L. Gray, 2011, *Honors in Practice*, p. 103-111. Copyright 2011 National Collegiate Honors Council.

great benefit of my model is that it does not necessitate team-teaching a course or class session. A joint class session or a joint assignment can become part of the linked courses if the instructors wish, but these elements are not necessary components to integration at all the levels of the hierarchy, and therefore to student engagement.

As my diagram of shared learning goals in ***Appendix*** illustrates, the middle levels of integration can be quite far-reaching if each instructor breaks his or her entire course into an organized series of learning goals and shares those with his or her teaching partner(s), and vice versa. The instructors could then jointly identify the learning outcomes that they share and decide which ones to focus on and when. This deliberate effort could fuel the flames of integrative learning likely to be kindled as a result of other elements of course linkage.[11]

Any particular assignment shared among the classes would involve the top two tiers of middle level integration, since that assignment would likely involve a shared theme as well as shared content. My teaching partners and I assigned a joint excursion project into Washington, DC during the last semester in which I taught as a part of this program. This was an ambitious assignment, in that it attempted to address a shared theme, shared content, and also utilize experiential learning. My first two attempts at an excursion assignment did get students out and about in our nation's capital, while they thought about the content and themes of our philosophy course, but these assignments were not clearly necessary to understanding elements of the course, nor were they integrated with the other linked courses. At best, these assignments reinforced some of the topics we read and discussed in class while also building community and making students more aware of their locale. The integrated excursion project, however, really advanced student learning, in my estimation, in addition to building community and enhancing student awareness of the city in which they were living. The reason for this advance in learning may pertain to the fact that this was my third attempt at a Washington, DC excursion assignment, and/or to the fact that my theology teaching partner and I combined our efforts to design such an assignment in a way that would really help the students learn more about what we were trying to teach them. The last text in our spring philosophy course, "The Modern Mind" was to be Nietzsche's *Uses and Abuses of History for Life*, which is about his philosophy of history, in part, and also, in part, about his criticisms of other nineteenth century popular philosophies of history. My theology teaching partner suggested taking the students to the Holocaust Museum, and in an effort to discern whether or not such a trip could reinforce or advance student learning in my course, I realized that if we focused on Hitler's philosophy of history as it was portrayed in the propaganda exhibit, and then the horrifying consequences of that theory portrayed in gut-wrenching detail throughout the museum, we could better understand the stakes involved in a debate about the philosophy of history as it pertains to a culture or society—in this case, modern Germany. Though some thinkers associate Nietzchean thought with Nazism, my class and I actually focused on the ways in which Nietzsche's philosophy of history *contrasted* Hitler's, and lent itself much more to the promotion of life than Hitler's theory, which led to so much death and despair. We discussed these contrasting theories in class before and after the trip, and the students wrote a reflection piece on them as well, explicitly connecting these theories to exhibits at the Holocaust

[11] Mahoney and Schamber compare definitions of integrative learning. First, that offered by Huber, et al: Integrative learning involves "developing the ability to make, recognize, and evaluate connections among disparate concepts, fields, or contexts." Next, that of AAC&U: "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." See Mahoney and Schamber, 234-235. My explanation of Socratic teaching and learning clearly includes the former, and also includes the incrementally increasing complexity of syntheses described by the latter.

Museum. I would not have come up with such a project had it not been for the influence of my theology teaching partner, so in this way, linking our excursion assignment was beneficial to our students. Furthermore, our post-trip discussion was a joint class session aimed at encouraging students to make connections between the philosophical and theological elements of the assignment. There is some literature testifying to the pedagogical value of such class sessions.[12]

The bottom tier of middle level integration (B, iii.) involves developing a well-thought out, coordinated effort to care for individual students most effectively and efficiently. For example, instructors may have a conversation or two about how to challenge a highly-achieving student, or how to motivate an underachieving student. Conversations about how to provide help for specific struggling students may be common, as they were for my teaching partners and I, and the team approach to these issues increased our effectiveness. For one, our check-ins with one another served as reminders for us to address particular struggling students. Without such reminders, our efforts may have been delayed or forgotten. Though we did not explicitly hold each other accountable for these duties, this was the implied effect of the aforementioned reminders.

C. Low Level Integration

The goal of the lowest level of integration is to avoid scheduling conflicts between courses, to avoid stepping on each other's toes, and to plan courses in ways that serve students' needs best (i.e., challenging them but not overwhelming them). For instance, we were aware of the logistical demands of our teaching partner's course and we tried to avoid scheduling major exams or paper assignments on the same day. Some will rightly object that we do students a disservice when we deprive them of the opportunity to navigate such difficulties, but I will respond by pointing out that student learning decreases when students feel resentful of their instructors, and it is possible that certain scheduling issues (like a major exam on the same day) for courses that are supposed to be coordinated in relation to one another, could fuel some resentment. Nonetheless, though these scheduling efforts can be helpful to students, they are by no means essential to effective course integration or the integrative learning such linkage aims to promote.

III. THEORETICAL VERSUS ACTUAL SUCCESSES OF THIS MODEL

The model above gradually dawned on me during the three years of teaching linked courses, such that I only first articulated it in outline form in my second year (spring 2011). My official evaluations from each of the six semesters indicate that my students became more aware of the fact that they were part of a learning community starting in that term.[13] I also notice more comments, starting that term, reflecting students' awareness of the full import of what they were learning. It is then that more of them seemed to realize why aspects of our course could be important to their lives beyond our class, and even beyond

[12] Mahoney and Schamber say this sort of activity pushes students beyond what they would explore in each class individually. See Mahoney and Schamber, 244. Hatcher explains that there are skills that transcend individual disciplines, which therefore, are especially developed through integrative learning approaches. See Hatcher, 249. Ford and Gray explain that their block course session format was "incredibly rewarding . . . it was the kind of teaching experience one dreams about—students fully engaged, discussions exciting and unpredictable." See Ford and Gray, 107.

[13] I base this assessment on my observations of qualitative feedback. For instance, during the term in question, and in spring 2012, more students mentioned the LC specifically in their remarks than during any other previous semester.

college.[14] In order to test these hypotheses based on my evaluations, I would need to compare and contrast the feedback students gave me with the feedback they provided to my teaching partners. This is not possible.

Theoretically, course integration can have many positive results, which are well documented.[15] However, I contend that those results will be more pronounced if instructors use the model above as a guide. This enhanced learning is mostly the result of deliberately approaching topics or themes from the perspective of multiple disciplines. For our upper level theme, "What is the good?"[16] students learned about philosophical conceptions of the good from thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Nietzsche, and they also learned about theological approaches to this question, from thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas. Therefore, students were able to develop their understanding of this metaphysical concept using both philosophical and theological resources. Most importantly though, as we discussed the work of those who did not directly address this question, we had to think critically about how those texts contributed answers to this question. For instance, when studying Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, he discusses the political good at length, but not the good, in general, in itself, and so we had to think about what his treatment of the political good contributed to our understanding of the good in general. This exercise develops students' ability to understand the connection between metaphysics and political philosophy. At the same time, students were engaged in the same sort of exercise in theology, except with regard to topics specific to that discipline, but still under the overall heading of the good. We did this for all of the sub-topics listed in the appendix below, though I could have done a better job of reminding students to think about our discussions in relation to our overall theme more often. My attention was usually diverted to specific lessons, assignments, and grading. I also think we could have done a better job of coordinating the timing of our treatment of those sub-topics. It would have been good, for instance, to discuss the question "What is enlightenment?" at around the same time, but we did not get around to coordinating that. Also, since my class proceeded from one text to the next in chronological order, we often treated multiple topics or questions at once, making it more difficult to coordinate with another course.

Besides the plethora of integrative learning that can take place by means of course linking at the top and middle levels, individual students at risk or in crisis can benefit greatly when faculty intervene in a coordinated manner. Instead of one faculty member dropping notes to the student to come to office hours or get help from a university resource, the student gets that message twice, and the relevant university resource has two faculty from whom to gather information on behalf of the student. Additionally, faculty working as a team can remind one another about students needing care who may have fallen through the cracks. I know that in the midst of a busy semester, it is very challenging to

[14] I also base this on observations about specific student comments in the optional "additional comments" section of their official evaluations from the university. For instance, in spring 2011, one student wrote, "This course was informative, interesting, and taught us how to view life in a whole new way." Another wrote, "The content helped with my entire freshman year, not just philosophy." Another student explained, "I found myself using the subject matter in everyday life and I have a better appreciation for it." Finally, one student described the course as "very enlightening." In spring 2012, one student wrote, "I learned a lot about new ways of thinking . . ." That term, another indicated that "I thought this class was different from other classes I have taken before because it required us to think about things we normally wouldn't. It allowed us to understand how reason and knowledge play a part in every aspect of life." One other student wrote that the course "made me think of life in a new perspective." Finally, in that term, another student added, "Of all the courses I have completed, and will hope to begin, this course . . . proved to be . . . incredibly influential on my faculties, desires, aspirations, and career." Before 2011, I notice many fewer student comments like those above, indicating that the course had such a profound effect on students holistically.

[15] See footnotes 6, 7, and 12 above.

[16] I must thank John Schlachter for this idea.

remember to reach out to students who are excessively absent, those whose grades have really slipped, or those who have been disengaged in class. A coordinated effort can help greatly in this regard. There were a number of occasions throughout my three years of teaching as part of a team that I reached out to struggling students because of conversations that my teaching partner and I had. On some of those occasions, more than one of us worked together to help an at-risk student. Though I cannot say with certainty how much those students benefited from our efforts, I *can* say with certainty that I spent more time reaching out to students in difficulty when I taught as part of a team.

By paying attention to all of the levels of integration I've explained, we engage our students on multiple fronts, and we therefore educate and care for them better than we probably would in a non-linked course. As I've already begun to explain, opting for shared class sessions, or what has typically been referred to as a fully integrated model, may not be as conducive to full integration in accord with my model because of the challenges that teachers sharing time and space often face. Though the efforts I am suggesting do not involve the toil of fully team teaching a single course, they nevertheless do take work and careful planning, which brings me to the next section of this paper.

IV. CHALLENGES, AND TIPS ON OVERCOMING OR AVOIDING THEM

First, coordination among faculty teaching linked courses is crucial to begin at the planning phases of the course, when instructors are making syllabi and ordering books. It is at this time that a list, like that in the appendix, ought to begin to form, as well as possible shared assignments or class sessions. By working on this before the courses begin, faculty can plan their syllabi accordingly, in an effort to optimize the number of shared questions or themes, and to discuss those shared themes at around the same time whenever possible.

Once the semester is underway, regular meetings (ideally in person) with one's teaching partner are crucial to coordinating approaches to shared themes, assignments, and struggling students. My teaching partners found that one thirty-minute meeting each week was sufficient, and of course, it helps a great deal for each person to have agenda items ready in advance. For the coordination of a shared assignment or shared class session, additional meetings are needed.

Another practice that would have greatly enhanced our efforts is regularly reviewing the teaching partner's syllabus and lesson plan (if available) when prepping one's own class sessions. If I had done this, I could have referred to the other discipline's approach to our topic of the day, and thereby encouraged more deliberate integrative learning by my students. An even better way to remain aware of what is going on in my counterpart's course would have been to attend it regularly. This of course would double one's time in class, and so, is not feasible for many of us. It certainly was not feasible for my teaching partners and I, who were all still graduate students at the time.

Aside from coordinating shared assignments and sessions, as well as attending each other's classes, all of which are not essential to successful integration in my model, faculty efforts toward course integration need not be exceedingly time consuming. These efforts—a few extra hours in the planning stages and perhaps one extra hour per week during the term (the 30-minute meeting with one's teaching partner, plus a review of their syllabus and lesson plans during prep)—are manageable for the great majority of us. Administrators and chairpersons can help in this regard by slightly diminishing the workload of those who take on a linked course, perhaps by reducing the instructor's advising load or encouraging them to take a semester off from one or two committees. To encourage part-timers to take on such courses, the aforementioned stakeholders ought to consider paying those faculty members for the extra time they would spend teaching such a course. For instance, perhaps instead of being paid for three credits, they could be paid for four.

These considerations might raise the question in the reader's mind about the extent to which administrative involvement is needed in order to teach a well-integrated, linked course. If two or more faculty members interested in integrating their courses are willing to do so without a reduced workload or extra pay, they could simply attempt to adhere to my model as they execute their courses. One downside to this, besides the unreduced workload and/or lack of additional compensation, is that the courses will not be listed in the catalog or on the university intranet as linked courses. Therefore, the students enrolling in them would not know what they had gotten into until the courses began, which could technically constitute an ethical violation. Also, the university would presumably want to take credit for such innovation, and even to encourage it to possibly increase persistence and retention, which is only possible if administrators become involved. Therefore, it seems best to partner with one's administration when attempting a linked course, and one can determine whether or not this is viable the same way they would determine whether or not they wished to partner with another instructor on linking courses: By considering how well one would work with that person, based on past history, reputation, and so on.

If linked courses are being initiated not by faculty but by administrators, then instructors face the risk of having a teaching partner with whom they do not work well. For this reason, it would behoove administrators to involve instructors in the pairing up of teaching partners, or at least to make such decisions with instructors' personalities and working habits in mind.

V. CONCLUSION

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the possible, theoretical successes of course integration and those I am able to identify in my own efforts. This could be the result of the fact that my teaching teams and I never set out to measure the outcomes of our integration efforts, but it could also be the result of our shortcomings, some of which were related to challenges we faced.

Nonetheless, course integration can be maximized, while concurrently maximizing student engagement, if one and one's teaching partner(s) adhere to the above model. This effort also need not take a great deal of time, as I have explained.

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APPENDIX

Theology 201 and Philosophy 202 Shared Learning Goals[17]

Top Level Integration

I. What is the good?

A. Who or what is God and what are the implications of the answer to this question? Is God an idea, a feeling, a person, a creature, something else?

Middle Level Integration

1. What is the relationship between humans, creation, and God?

(Each Arabic numeral could conceivably correspond to one week of a semester course.)

a. What is the nature of covenant? What is a covenant? Who may make one?

i. What is the role of the Catholic Church in the world? Does this differ from what it should be? How did the Church's role differ between the Patristic, Medieval, and Enlightenment ages?
ii. What is the role of the Christian in the world? Is something other than internal belief required of Christians?
- Are Christians called to stand up for the faith even in the face of death?

[17] The following chart was co-written with Elizabeth M. Smith, M.Div., Ph.D., and used with her permission.

   b. What does it mean to say that God became human? Does it mean that a human became God? Does it mean that God simply put on a "man suit" and looked like a human? Something else?

      i. In becoming human, did God have to suffer the limitations of being human (pain, fear, etc.)?

2. Is it the role of reason to defend the existence of God and the soul?

   a. If so, is this the job of philosophy and is it the handmaiden to theology? Or, can faith only approach issues of God and the soul?

      i. Is there a conflict between faith and reason in this regard?
      ii. Should faith precede understanding, or do we first need to understand something in order to believe in it?

3. Is there a universal principle that commands human conduct?

   a. Can human conduct be commanded from an external source?

      i. Can love be commanded?

   b. Is Scripture authoritative in the realm of theology? How is this similar/different to Scripture's authority in the realm of philosophy?

4. Is it good to do good for the sake of happiness in this life? In the next?

5. Is truth possible? Does it exist?

   a. Does it depend on God's existence?

   b. Can we access it?

   c. Who decides what it is?

   d. What does it mean to say that a truth is revealed?

      i. Who is/are the author(s) of Scripture?

6. Is there a law of God? Is it perceptible to humans? Has it changed throughout time, or does God require the same things of people in all ages?

7. Is hope justified? If so, how?

   a. What is salvation?

i. How does it work? Are people saved simply through belief or must they do good things (actions) as well?
ii. Does salvation erase original sin?

B. What is Enlightenment?

1. Is there a conflict between faith and reason in general?

2. Is it better to proceed philosophically beginning with nature or beginning with a universal understanding of the human person?

   a. Are all humans created equal?

      i. Does God single out some groups or individuals?
         If so, does this make them better or more valuable than other people, or does it mean something else?

   b. Is it right for people to physically harm other people under any circumstances?

3. Is it good to try to dominate or master nature or history?

   a. Is it wrong to be scientific?

   b. Should we free ourselves from the past?

   c. Is it of any value to follow or live by our instincts, rather than our calculations? Is there a moral value to our emotions?

   d. What is the value of modesty? Is it wrong to be proud of human progress?

4. Is hope justified?

   a. Is hope for future progress or mastery justified?

5. What is freedom and what is its role in humanity?

   a. Are people created free?

      i. Do some have the right to politically oppress others? (Holocaust Museum shared assignment could fit in here.)
      ii. Do humans have free will?
         - Why would God create humans with free will? Would there not be less suffering and evil in the world if God decided/controlled everything people did?

- Why is there evil in the world? What is evil? Where did it come from? Why do people do evil things? ■

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