

Capstones across disciplines RESOURCES

Typology: Disciplinarity

There are several variations in the way that disciplines may be managed in the curriculum. These variations form a continuum from a pure discipline knowledge focus to collaboration between disciplines and transgression of discipline boundaries. This typology can be used as a decision-making tool when designing curriculum for one or more disciplines. It provides an introduction to the common definitions of the way that disciplines can be combined or integrated, along with some of the benefits and challenges of each approach.

	Description	Pros	Cons
Intra-disciplinary	<p>Students work within their own discipline area and relevant topics.</p> <p>Although students may use information from other disciplines to contextualise or evaluate responses to questions, the process is generally focused on gathering discipline knowledge and skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepted discipline paradigm, focus is on well-established content structures Lecturers have relevant knowledge and experience to direct activity In group work team members share similar conceptualisations and language Students learn how to achieve relative to expectations of discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are not challenged beyond discipline boundaries Difficulties in differentiating expertise and roles in group work can mean labour division is superficial and frustrating for students May be too specialised for answering the 'big' questions Students learn how to achieve only relative to expectations of discipline
Pluri-disciplinary	<p>Students from related disciplines explore themes that apply to those disciplines.</p> <p>For example, students from sociology and cultural studies are brought together for classes on Marxism, Design students are brought together to study development of design proposals or design history.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick start on projects as students work from a familiar discipline perspective Builds understanding of discipline and connections to other disciplines In group work team members share similar conceptualisations and language but may have opportunities to differentiate roles Students can achieve relative to expectations of discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are not likely to be challenged beyond discipline boundaries Students may only learn how to achieve relative to expectations of discipline Lecturers have to accommodate the understanding of more than one discipline group Students are likely to learn how to achieve only relative to expectations of discipline

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Cross-disciplinary	<p>One discipline is seen from the perspective of another. Can lead to the naming of new discipline-related specialisms. Students apply discipline knowledge to a new area. Challenges can be designed as one discipline team acting as consultants to another.</p> <p>For example, the students from sociology examine design as a sociological phenomenon, or students from business marketing investigate education from a strategic marketing perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to identify impact of own discipline on others • Can mirror the professional consultancy process • Builds discipline-based confidence, critical thinking and skills of application to unfamiliar situations • Flexible concept in terms of delivery, can be individual or group work, single or multiple disciplines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are not necessarily challenged beyond discipline boundaries, discipline privilege is likely to be maintained • Can embed a discipline-centric view of the world and encourage cross-discipline conflict rather than understanding • Consulting model can be complex to design and manage
Multi-disciplinary and inter-professional	<p>Tends to involve somewhat related disciplines or disciplines that share particular concerns. Students from different disciplines work on a single challenge, but have discipline-related roles /outcomes. Each student makes contributions from their own discipline perspective, negotiate/consult across disciplines, learn from each other and contribute to the common outcome.</p> <p>For example, working on a report, students cooperate to establish timelines and tasks, but work independently on sections related to their own discipline, drawing on the expertise of others as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick start on activities as students work from a familiar discipline perspective • Builds confidence in discipline perspective and respect for the contributions of other disciplines • Close replication of much professional team work in large organisations • Straightforward to identify and assess individual contributions in team projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are not necessarily challenged beyond discipline boundaries • Meaningful negotiation and interaction between disciplines needs to be managed • Timing student activities and outcomes can be difficult if they are inter-dependent (ie one activity is reliant on the completion of another) • Can require team-teaching to ensure lecturers have relevant knowledge of alternate discipline perspectives

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Inter-disciplinary	<p>Directly aimed at developing a unified outcome from several discipline perspectives. Emphasises links between disciplines, although the disciplines may be quite distinct. Students work together to achieve a shared goal, collaborate to identify issues, and propose a single set of outcomes that uses and integrates discipline-specific knowledge.</p> <p>For example, students from mixed discipline groups develop an integrated strategic approach to a social issue that accommodates multiple discipline perspectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are challenged to examine disciplinary boundaries and assumptions • Considerable collaboration and team work is required • Mirrors high level committee and working group processes, negotiation and communication skills • Builds discipline knowledge and personal confidence in working with others, particularly in utilising a wide range of discipline expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be slow to start up, with students spending significant time understanding one another • Generally requires team teaching, or lecturers need to take a non-discipline perspective, be able to draw on examples from a range of disciplines • Individual contributions may be difficult to identify in very integrated team projects • Requires students to have some previous grounding in discipline and critical skills
Trans-disciplinary	<p>Transcends, transgresses or collapses disciplinary boundaries. Students work together on a complex theme or topic, and may make use of methods, concepts or processes drawn from any source. The issue or situation presented is something that requires new ways of thinking.</p> <p>For example, students undertake a review of a global issue, critique existing discipline paradigms and develop a strategic response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are challenged to extend thinking far beyond disciplinary boundaries and assumptions • Provides context for creatively addressing complex and poorly defined problems • Builds academic and personal confidence to challenge conventional thinking • The problem definition in itself can be the outcome, creating a stepping stone to research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be slow to start up, students may spend significant time establishing the problem definition • Lecturers need to extend beyond a discipline approach, be able to draw on and critique a range of discipline frameworks • Individual contributions, division of labour and roles may be difficult to identify in team projects • Requires students to step beyond discipline epistemology and to have strong critical analysis skills

Other terms	
Extra-disciplinary	Used to indicate topics of interest to a discipline group but from outside of the standard content area, and therefore often treated as an 'introduction to...'. May be taught in such a way as to contextualise the topic within the cohort's discipline area, or focus on generic skills applicable to a wide range of disciplines. In this case, care must be taken to be inclusive of differing starting points and conceptual understanding from the disciplines.

Useful references

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