

Integrative Learning: Our Flexible Future

Dr. Carole Husto, Dr. Noelle Norton

University of San Diego, the United States

Abstract

Higher education is at a crossroads. Critics have argued that colleges and universities seem out of touch with contemporary social challenges and issues, or that they are programmatically focused on degrees as commodities that afford entrance to specific careers. As an alternative to siloed disciplines with diffuse or too narrowly defined goals, the University of San Diego has integrated our liberal arts traditions with a new approach to general education (our core curriculum), one that focuses the student experience on applying integrative learning to complex national and global issues from their first year at the institution to graduation. As an essential element in revisioning our core, we constructed and embedded an integrative-learning model during the first year and at advanced levels. Three high-impact practices, with demonstrated efficacy for student learning, characterize USD's model for the first-year experience: living-learning communities, interdisciplinary lenses for problem-solving, and collaborative assignments and projects. From the model's inception, faculty have been engaged in team research to discuss and improve the model's design, faculty roles and partnerships, student-centered learning, and assessment methodology; the model has provided an essential foundation. At advanced undergraduate levels, particularly in STEM, students engage in multi-disciplinary, intensive research targeting specific issues and problems from local to global contexts. Advanced-level projects and research have secured multi-million dollar granted-funded support in promoting pedagogical change and growth in facilities. Our presentation will cover key findings and examples from several years of research of the first-year and advanced levels of students' integrative learning experiences.

Keywords: integrative, model, student-centered, learning communities, research