TEACHING IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE PROGRAM: BUILDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COURSES

Denise R. Philpot, Ph.D., MBA
University of North Texas
1155 Union Circle, #305459
Denton, TX 76203-5459
214-460-9627
Denise.Philpot@unt.edu

ABSTRACT

Big data, applied data analytics, and the ability to use programming languages and applications to answer business and research questions combine to provide organizations with not only a competitive advantage, but a deep understanding of their customers, products and services, and overall organizational effectiveness. To provide an educational experience that not only prepares students for these exciting opportunities in all industries but helps them develop higher level critical thinking skills, the degree program that can create shared learning opportunities between courses offers a learning environment that more closing matches the environment they will most likely experience in the workplace. The challenge for universities is to build an interdisciplinary program that promotes integrated assignments across courses that encourage students to view the problem and solution from a variety of disciplines including analytics, computer science, management, and information systems.

The use of interdisciplinary programs to create learning opportunities that prepare students for the workplace that requires knowledge and skills in a variety of disciplines is not a new concept in higher education. Healthcare education programs have engaged in interdisciplinary programs for a number of years. The shortage of care givers and physicians in hospice and palliative care lead to the development of a successful program that was studied over a period of two years in the Chicago region (Levine, O'Mahony, Baron, Ansari, Deamant, Frader, Leyva, Marschke, & Preoder, 2017). Interdisciplinary programs are embraced in other countries as well as evidenced by the successful interdisciplinary program, The Networks of Centres of Excellence, launched in Canada in 1989, and more specifically, the Technology Evaluation in the Elderly Network, funded in 2012, which had 118 participants across 23 disciplines in 2013 (Kolomitro, Stockley, Egan, & Macdonald, 2015).

Many universities offer a masters program that partners leadership curriculum offered in the business program with a principal preparation program. The degree, an MBA in Educational Leadership, includes traditional management courses along with courses required for the student to be eligible to take the certification exam for school leadership (Smith & Somers, 2016). This is an excellent example of partnering between a college of business and a college of education to provide learning opportunities that would not be available simply by earning a masters degree in school administration. Increased training in business analytics and strategic management are integrated with the more traditional courses in instruction, curriculum, and assessment and education law.

Finally, in a recent study conducted by Lattuca, Knight, Seifert, Reason, and Liu, while learning outcomes do not appear to be statistically different between students in interdisciplinary programs compared to those in discipline-specific program, students in interdisciplinary programs report higher levels of enjoyment reading across various genres and expressing themselves in writing, and appear to have higher levels of engagement and enjoy thinking about real-world problems. As we build curriculum that is engaging, relevant, and rigorous with the desired outcome of increasing engaged learners that can successfully solve complex problems, creating learning opportunities across disciplines is a proven way to achieve these goals.

REFERENCES

Kolomitro, K., Stockley, D., Egan, R., & MacDonald, M. L., (2015). Crossing Boundaries: The Design of an Interdisciplinary Training Program to Improve Care for the Frail Elderly. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education, 36:3*, 302-317.

Lattuca, L. R., Knight, D., Seifert, T. A., Reason, R. D., & Liu, Q., (2017). Examining the Impact of Interdisciplinary Programs on Student Learning. *Innovative Higher Education, 42*, 337-353.

Levine, S., O'Mahony, S., Baron, A., Ansari, A., Deamant, C., Frader, J., Leyva, I., Marschke, M., & Preorder, M., (2017). Training the Workforce: Description of a Longitudinal Interdisciplinary Education and Mentoring Program in Palliative Care. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 53:4,* 728-737.

Smith, R. A., & Somers, J., (2016). MBA in Education Leadership: A Model for Developing an Interdisciplinary Principal Preparation Program. *Planning and Changing, 47:1/2*, 3-20.