

Curriculum Integration: It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, at large state universities and small, private liberal arts colleges, curriculum integration of education abroad is being implemented in a variety of ways—and it is having a significant impact on the internationalization of campuses.

"I think the curriculum integration effort is the next major round, or process, within study abroad that needs to happen," says Steven Duke, director of international studies at Wake Forest University. "Increased collaboration between academic departments and study abroad leads to greater awareness on the part of the faculty about study abroad options and opportunities; and greater awareness on the part of study abroad advisers of the academic or curricular needs that may constrict what students can do."

"It's transforming our relationships with academic departments," says Heather Barclay Hamir, director of study abroad at the University of Texas, Austin (UT-Austin), where an ambitious project of course-for-course matching to partner institutions abroad is underway.

And according to Joe Hoff, who has been instrumental in moving curriculum integration forward at both Oregon State and the University of Richmond, where he currently serves as associate dean of international education and coordinator of culture and languages across the curriculum, "With curriculum integration, the Office of International Education becomes much more central to what's happening within the university. You have students coming in, saying, 'I'm a computer science major, where can I study abroad?' Now everybody knows how to answer that question... We're part of the central academic mission of the college now because the departments have owned us as much as they would any other part of their curriculum."

What Is Curriculum Integration, and How Is It Implemented?

Gayle Woodruff, director of curriculum and campus internationalization for global programs and strategy alliance at the University of Minnesota, has observed a variety of successful models of curriculum integration across the country and around the world through her work in curriculum integration over the past 11 years. "I think the most important thing to stress is what I call the 'Power of One,'" she says. "It's the key element I've seen in all successful institutional initiatives: *one* international educator working with *one* motivated colleague in an academic unit, and beginning small. It's not launching a huge initiative that sets about to change an institution: that may be a goal further down the road, but the Power of One concept really helps make it more manageable for folks who are just starting curriculum integration. It's the small-scale change that I think is most exciting. I have seen time and time again, in many different institutional contexts, that when small change happens, large change can follow."



Lessons Learned

START SMALL.

All successful curriculum integration case studies began small, even in Minnesota, where a half-time staff member cost-shared with the College of Engineering began the pioneering effort to integrate study abroad into the curriculum.

TAKE YOUR TIME.

Curriculum integration takes time. Set goals, have a plan, and try to accomplish something on a regular basis. Universities that do curriculum integration on a shoestring devote one to two hours per week on curriculum integration.

REMEMBER THE “POWER OF ONE.”

It is possible for one international educator working with one motivated colleague in an academic unit to accomplish a great deal. Once change begins, others around campus will learn from that model. Success can be contagious!

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATION IS TO BUILD TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS.

The increase in students studying abroad will follow.

Contributed by Gayle Woodruff, director, curriculum and campus internationalization, Global Programs and Strategy Alliance at the University of Minnesota

Steven Duke first learned about the work being done in curriculum integration at the University of Minnesota when he was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He attended their conference on curriculum integration in 2004, and instantly saw the value in their approach. “The really wonderful thing about Minnesota’s model is the idea of a study abroad office working directly with an academic department,” he says.

At Wake Forest he is working, slowly and steadily, to build relationships with a handful of academic units, one by one. “Our intention is to work across the different groups of disciplines, so a little bit from the social sciences, a little bit from the humanities, and a little bit from the hard sciences. We’ve intentionally tried to tackle one or two departments from each of those groupings,” he says. “Our goal is to get people on board so we’ve got allies, and then as we move to other departments [in that same discipline area] we can say, ‘See, it’s not that hard, look at what they’ve done here.’..In a nutshell, Part 1 of the conversation with the department is, ‘Where would you like your students to go, and what would you like them to be studying or learning while they are abroad?’ Part 2 is, ‘Let’s find some programs that fit the academic needs of your department.’ And Part 3 is formatting the information so that students can digest it.” At Wake Forest the advising sheets they’ve developed are very simple: “Two pages back to back, with a lot of white space, not a lot

of detail: just three or four main points, and a short list of approved programs. Our goal is to get students to come to our office, or to go to the identified person in their department who can help advise them about study abroad. So, shorter is better.”

“Curriculum integration seems to mean different things to different institutions,” says Hamir. “I’m not sure that everyone who talks about it means exactly the same thing...And that’s a good thing: you have to make it what you need it to be to serve your institution and your students best.”

At UT-Austin, curriculum integration means going down to the level of actual course matching for particular partner universities. Because of the amount of detailed work involved in this approach, a decision was made to restructure the Office of Study Abroad to create a new position, with 50 percent of the time assigned to working with departments to move curriculum integration forward. “We decided that this was important enough that we would create a position to focus on it. The original attempt was to spread it out across multiple people, and it just kept getting lost in the shuffle. It’s not something that’s very easy when you’re midway into a project with a department, to kind of lose track of it for several months and then try to pick it back up,” Hamir explains.

Margaret McCullers is the person who was hired to coordinate curriculum integration at UT-Austin. (Half of her time is devoted to curriculum integration, and the

other to a variety of special projects.) This process involves creating department-specific brochures (that can be used by advisers to help guide students toward study abroad programs that have been vetted and approved by the department. In addition, the My Credit Abroad Database allows students to check, course by course, exactly how the credits they earn abroad will transfer back. At a very large, decentralized institution like UT-Austin, detailed brochures that have been vetted and approved by each department are invaluable, McCullers says. “The brochures are the number-one academic resource for our students. Some students may never come to our office, but if they see that their academic unit is in effect saying, ‘We value study abroad, and here’s a great place to get started,’ we may be able to break down some of the barriers for our students: they can clearly see which courses to choose, and whether a program works for them or not. The brochures are credit-driven: the message to students is, you’re not selecting a study abroad program because of location, you’re selecting it because of the credits you can earn there. That goes to the heart of the mission of the university as well,” McCullers says.

Because course-matching is involved, this task involves a lot of interaction not only with faculty at the home institution, but with partners abroad as well. “The challenge is often just gathering the syllabi and getting the course information in place so we can have

Practical Tips From the Trenches

“Before going to the chemistry department, we researched the number of their majors who had studied abroad, and the types of courses they took while abroad... We discovered in working with the department that there is a very specific time when it is good for their majors to study abroad. In their sixth semester, it is much easier for them, because there is more flexibility in the curriculum. So now we are encouraging chemistry majors to plan their studies in such a way that they can study abroad during that semester.”

—Steven Duke (*Wake Forest*)

“The print version of our brochure is the tip of the iceberg of what we’re trying to accomplish with curriculum integration. We commit to the department that if they’ll work with us and help us determine which programs are the best fit for their students, and when their students should go abroad, and why they should go abroad: then my office will pay for these brochures. We’re asking departments to think about how best they can get this information out early to their students. One of the brochures we just finished is going to go into the department’s freshman orientation packet.”

—Heather Barclay Hamir (*UT-Austin*)

“We decided not to do advising sheets, we’re just focusing on the Web: it’s easily accessed from everywhere, and we don’t have information on paper that has to be changed all the time. We’ve also instituted a link-up with Studio Abroad [a software program], so that if we change something in our office, it’s automatically changed on the Web site.”

—Joe Hoff (*University of Richmond*)

it evaluated by the departments,” McCullers says. “We absolutely won’t publish a program unless we’ve been able to get enough courses approved to fill either an entire spring or fall semester. It’s sometimes challenging to gather that information, but it’s starting to get a little bit easier, because now our partners abroad know what we need.”

At the University of Richmond, Joe Hoff decided that creating a new and unique name for the process would be helpful in minimizing confusion as well as in ensuring that faculty understood that the process underway was “home grown” and tailored to their own unique institutional needs. “We already have curriculum internationalization grants, and curriculum integration of study abroad sounded a little bit too similar. We thought people were going to become confused, so at UR we call it MISA (Major Integration of Study Abroad).”

At the University of Georgia in Athens (UGA), a different approach to curriculum integration was launched last year by Kavita Pandit, associate provost for international affairs. This initiative awards faculty grants for work designed to enhance the international content of on-campus courses, and it has had an interesting side-effect.

“Several faculty grantees have used the grants in ways that relate closely to existing study abroad programs,” says Kasee Clifton Laste, director of education abroad. “I see it as a complement to our study abroad offerings. With about a quarter of each graduating class already studying abroad, and that number having held steady for a few years, we felt it was time to make sure that the students who do not study abroad have broad and deep exposure to international content as well.”

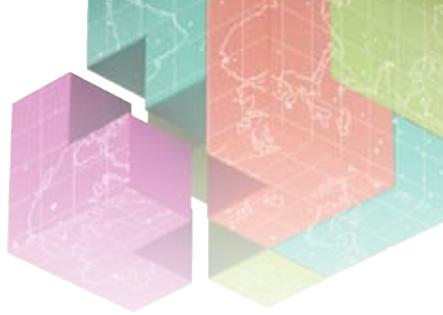
The response to the curriculum integration grants has been enthusiastic.

“We’ve had two or three times as many proposals as we could fund. Some of the ones we could not fund were nevertheless excellent, and have either gone on to be developed without funding, or have found funding elsewhere on campus,” Laste says.

The curriculum integration grants have also led to broadened and improved relationships between the office of education

abroad and faculty. “In many cases, the faculty applying for these grants are familiar to us through their work with study abroad programs. But in other cases we have made entirely new connections and collaborations on campus,” Laste says. “Another goal we have had is mentoring—that those who receive grants will help spread the word and encourage their colleagues to think proactively about the international content in their existing or new courses. And I think that’s happening.”

One of the faculty awarded funds in the current year is Michael Tarrant, of UGA’s Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources’s Global Programs in Sustainability (GPS). Since 2006 GPS has offered a class, “Antarctica: The Fragile Continent,” which includes an “embedded” two-week trip to Antarctica as a required element in a fall or spring semester course. One of the elements of the on-campus portion of the class has been online distance education content provided by the University of Canterbury’s Gateway Antarctica Center in New Zealand. The funds Tarrant received through the curriculum integration grant program are being used to create UGA’s own online course, working with individuals from institutions and organizations across the United States and around the world. This will allow GPS to better match the range and depth of the topics covered in the course with their own very specific pedagogical goals of fostering global citizenship through educational travel. One aspect of the course involves students debating the pros and cons of bioprospecting in Antarctica. “By identifying and working with our own speakers, we are better able to represent this issue,” Tarrant says. “Ultimately, the strongest cases are made on the basis of values, not science. The implications for humility and respect are paramount, and come to the fore.” He adds, “So few institutions around the world offer Antarctica studies. Combining a field program to the continent with distance education, working with some of the world’s leading scientists, should be quite unique. And the program will now be open to all UGA students, as well as students from elsewhere.”



Benefits of Curriculum Integration

While enthusiasm for curriculum integration seems unanimous in the field, many agree that working closely and collaboratively with departments can be labor intensive and time consuming, even when there is dedicated staff whose primary responsibility is curriculum integration.

“It takes time,” says Hoff. “You need some percentage of someone’s workload dedicated to this process. It takes a lot of listening, a lot of collaboration. If you have only one person, and it’s only part of their time, it’s going to take a number of years, it’s not going to happen overnight.”

Duke agrees: “This is a three- to ten-year effort,” he says. “We have approached it as a 12-18 month process for each major. It’s a long-run process, not a sprint.”

Despite the effort it takes, integrating the curriculum with education abroad pays off.

“With curriculum integration, study abroad is no longer a sideshow, off to the

Curriculum Integration of Education Abroad is a new e-publication from NAFSA. Download it at www.nafsa.org/curriculumintegration.

side on your campus somewhere,” Hoff says. “We’re working with the departments [and] collaborating with them. So, we have much better visibility, much better collaboration, and therefore hopefully much better advocacy as well for the future..”

Plus, curriculum integration can impact students who might not otherwise study abroad.

“One of the biggest benefits is that curriculum integration has mitigated the academic risk for students who might not

traditionally study abroad,” says McCullers. “Now, at least academically, they have the opportunity to do so. We have a large first-generation-in-college population. Their job is to go to college and graduate in four years, and then get into the job market as soon as possible so they can help the family. Now they’re able to say, ‘I have this opportunity and it’s not going to slow me down, it’s going to be just as if I were here on campus for a semester, and here’s how, I can show you!’ We’re trying to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to study abroad if they want to, regardless of their background. That’s what we’re really excited to see as this unfolds, as time goes on.” **IE**

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