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Course Design in an Integrated First-Year Honors Sequence: Service Learning, Scaffolded Research, & Faculty Collaboration

Jerri J. Kropp & Trent W. Maurer



ABSTRACT

In this presentation, participants will learn about a collaboration of two professors working with a cohort of 15 students in a year-long integrated sequence first-year Honors course. Both semesters of the course center around the theme of animals in the lives of children, families, and communities. In the first semester, the course focuses more narrowly on animal-assisted therapies. In the second semester, the course focuses more broadly on global and diversity issues. As part of this course, students must complete both 25 hours of service learning and a research project. Students complete the project in multiple scaffolded steps, first at an individual level (fall semester) by identifying a topic related to the course, finding five relevant research articles, and presenting one article to the class. At the end of the fall semester, students create poster presentations which incorporate all five articles. In the spring semester, students are placed into small groups around common topic themes and integrate their research findings and work toward a final product presenting multiple research studies in a meta-analysis style tabular format to the class. The primary objective of the session is to demonstrate a method to involve students in research through the curriculum, leading to analysis and integration of research findings. Participants will be involved by seeing examples of each step and by discussing the authors' experiences in using this approach. Participants will learn about the benefits of: a) collaboration with another faculty member, b) working with the same cohort of students over two semesters, and c) the student outcomes when first-year are involved in scaffolded steps in understanding research.



COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

FYE 1220H:

In this class, students will explore the history and practice of animal assisted therapy, as well as receive an extended orientation to the university. The seminar component focus will be on how animals are used to help with various patient populations, such as children, the disabled, and the elderly, and any other settings where animals are used therapeutically. In addition, the psychological and physiological effects of human-animal interaction will be discussed. The class will include reading, research, discussion, guest speakers, and visits to facilities in the community which use animal assisted therapy.

FYE 1410H:

This section will explore the place of animals in the lives of children and families in a global context. Students will investigate different cultures' conceptualizations of animals as pets, servants, and sustenance, and the underlying values and beliefs that enable those conceptualizations. Service learning from the Fall FYE 1220 course will continue with students participating in animal-assisted activities in the local community.

HONORS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Honors sections of FYE 1220/FYE1410 differ from non-honors sections in several distinct ways:

- Students participate in a community-based learning project where they provide service to an organization or agency.
- During each semester, students are required to complete a substantial research project incorporating research into the theme, class discussions, and reflection on the service-learning experience. This project should count for a significant portion of the total grade, roughly one-third of the grade.

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

Students participated in one of the following (25 hours over the academic year):

- Visits with a community partner who has a certified therapy dog (TDI Chapter 215). They visited nursing homes/assisted living, Reading to Rover at the Statesboro Regional Library, Walk for Wishes, GSU Child Development Center, Midterm/Final Exam week at Henderson Library, and Camp Twin Lakes/Blue Skies (programs for adults with disabilities)
- Stirrup Some Fun at Fletcher Park (therapeutic riding program for children and youth with disabilities)

Required to reflect on visits/experiences via course blog 10x over the academic year:

- What happened during the interaction?
- What was your reaction to the experience?
- How did this experience relate to the class? (cite information from readings)
- Do you have any questions or concerns about the experience?

Required to reflect on peers' blogs twice in Spring semester (1 per program)

- What does it appear that the poster learned from this experience?
- What did the clients get out of this visit?
- How is it similar to or different from your own service learning experience?
- What might be some global issues to consider if we were to adapt the poster's kind of AAA to an international context?
- Must include at least 1 APA style citation

BLOG EXAMPLES

"The main portion of our time today [at the CDC] was spent with the infants . . . however I still got to see a new side of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) by observing a double non-verbal communication between the therapy dog and the infants. Watching the infants literally crawl out of the room to come gawk at Wrigley was enough to make any amount of time watching them worthwhile, however it also allowed me see how effective Animal Assisted Therapy is when the medium of spoken communication was removed."

"Working with Stirrup Some Fun has opened my eyes to a whole new level of ways that these amazing animals can help humans. Therapeutic horseback riding can be used to achieve a variety of objectives including cognitive, social, physical, educational, and behavioral goals (Drnach, O'Brien, & Kreger, 2010). For those who are physically handicapped, they are a source of freedom. For the thirty minutes astride the horse, the participants can forget their disabilities and feel powerful and mobile. The effects are not limited to just when astride the horse; participants generally improve movement in their every day lives from working on horses. The warmth, shape, and rhythmical, three-dimensional movements of the horse improve flexibility, posture, balance, and mobility of the rider (Snider, Korner-Bitensky, Kammann, Warner, & Saleh, 2007)."

"One thing to possibly think about regarding Sassy and way the nurses act around her is that they are also receiving some form of therapy as well. Just because Sassy was there to visit the patients, the nurses also see the visit as a break from monotony of their job and try to lift their own spirits by playing with Sassy. Sure they could be more aware that making a therapy dog bark can be bad for the patients, but I feel that if Sassy was a more mature dog then she might not get so riled up by the nurses. Also remember that the nurses do not have the same knowledge of animal assisted therapy that you do."

"I noticed a certain reaction in the students while they were reading [at Reading to Rover]; if Wrigley stood up or if another student came over to pet him, the student reading immediately became distracted. I also noticed that if I looked up or looked around, they would lose their place in reading or mess up their words. These reactions show the importance of my attention and Wrigley's attention to the students."

RESEARCH PROJECT

Fall FYE 1220H

- Faculty introduce how to search for peer-reviewed articles via Psyclnfo and Academic Search Complete; introduce APA style
- Library day to search for 5 articles on subtopic related to course (must be approved subtopic)
- Turn in list of 3 articles in APA style
- Present 1 approved article to class (grouped by theme); 5-7 minute PPT
- Paper: Apply CRAAP test to all 5 articles; turn in with copies of articles
- Create poster synthesizing findings from all 5 articles and present at poster session for class; list references in APA style
 - Community partners and Honors Faculty invited

Spring FYE 1410H

- Assigned to groups by theme
 - Autism
 - Prisons & Substance Abuse
 - Alzheimer's, Dementia, & Schizophrenia
 - AAA with Children/Special Needs Populations
- Locate additional articles with international focus; Library day to search
- Integrate each student's articles into one group list in APA style
- Revise/correct group list
- Summarize key features of each article in group Summary Table
 - Citation
 - Location
 - Design
 - Sample
 - Sample Size
 - Dependent Variables
 - Treatment(s)/Intervention(s)
 - Instrument(s)
 - Key Findings
- Revise/correct Summary Table and print as 3'x4' poster
- Deliver group presentation of poster to class integrating results of all studies and focusing on differences between research conducted in U.S. and abroad (2 minutes/person)



BENEFITS

Collaboration with another faculty member

- Differential knowledge and expertise (AAA vs. teaching research skills)
- Differential teaching approaches and methods
- Shared workload; integrative course design
- Gender differences; generational differences

Working with same student cohort over an academic year

- Sense of community
- Consistency with community partners
- Ability to use complex scaffolding approach for research project
- Ability to introduce topic, discuss in depth, then expand to global perspective

Student outcomes

- Year-long integrated research project with multiple presentation components
- 25 hours+ service learning in same capacity/setting; build relationships with community partners
- Opportunity for presentation at Honors Research Symposium