

Interdisciplinary Education and Critical Thinking in Religion and History: The Delivery of Two "Content-Based" Linked Courses

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Abstract

Primary sources in religion and history enable first year university students to connect "content-based" linked courses in the core curriculum. Fifty-four first year university students in three separate pairs of courses worked in teams to present oral critical reports on texts related to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Modern Era: themes intersecting religion and history.

Critical thinking skills equipped students to address content while team collaboration enabled both textual comprehension and formation of academic community. Both sets of skills informed related writing assignments.

The overall learning experience facilitated development of intellectual connections between the two courses (a primary goal of linked courses). Greater clarity in assignments and more time in the linked course format would enhance the learning experience.

Keywords: College Teaching, Linked Courses, Learning Communities, Integrated Curriculum, Interdisciplinary Education, Interdisciplinary Teaching.

Within the last twenty years linked courses have been developed as models for forging curricular relationships among academic disciplines (Smith, 1991) and building learning communities among students and their professors (Smith, 1991; Luebke, 2002). Linked courses are two courses in which the same group of students is enrolled, for example, a "content-based" course such as science and an "application course" such as writing (Kellogg, 1999).

It is noteworthy that proportionally few examples of two "content-based" linked courses appear in the literature. On the other hand, there are several examples of links created between "content-based" and "application courses." Most of the "content-application" courses are between courses in the humanities, sciences or social sciences on the one hand, and writing or speech on the other (Thompson, 1998). Chemistry 101 and English 101 constitute an example (Dunn, 1993).

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Links can also be created between two "content-based" courses (Luebke, 2002). This article addresses the need in the literature to describe the construction and implementation of "content-based" courses. In this case the courses which are described are offered in the core curriculum at LaSalle University in Philadelphia; they are entitled The Christian Tradition and Global History from The Reformation to The Present.

Background

The idea for the Christian Tradition-Global History link at LaSalle University came from a first year student who was enrolled simultaneously in both courses as individual stand-alone courses. The student found that both professor and students in the Global History course were turning to her as a student in the concurrently (but separately) running Christian Tradition course. She served as an important resource in providing insight into the religious context, significance, and implications of particular historical events, such as the Reformation, for example. She was supplying material from a religious perspective which, in turn, lent deeper significance to the historical movements being studied. Hence, the importance of this article, which describes the development of two "content-based" linked courses.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to explore, via a quasi-case study model, the helpfulness of studying primary source texts in religion and history as means of enabling first year university students to make intellectual connections between two linked courses in the core curriculum. The report describes, first, the organization of the content in the two linked courses and, second, some pedagogical processes developed in order to assist students (a) to find meaning in the texts and (b) to collaborate with their peers in the process of comprehension and meaning-making.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is: How can primary source texts in religion and history, focused through the lenses of critical pedagogical processes, enable first year university students to understand and to make intellectual connections between two linked courses (representing two different academic disciplines) in the core curriculum?

There are several related sub-questions: (1) What are some curricular links between the two courses, The Christian Tradition and Global History from The Reformation to The Present? (2) What does the application of pedagogical processes entail? (3) How can student responses to questions (including those indicating triangulation) posed by the Office of Institutional Research at LaSalle University demonstrate the validity of this study? (4) How can related literature and a limited degree of member-checking support the findings of the study and affirm its validity?

This paper aims to respond to the primary research question. At the same time, material appropriate to the sub-questions is relevant in addressing the primary research question.

Significance

The paper contributes to the literature from the perspective of scholarly research as well as from the perspective of teaching practice. The paper contributes to the relatively small collection of articles written about the implementation of two "content-based" linked courses which are paired together. The greater body of literature on "content-application" linked courses needs to be balanced through the addition of more material describing the delivery of "content-based" linked courses.

In addition, this paper contributes a detailed descriptive example of the actualization of two "content-based" courses paired together in the undergraduate core curriculum. While the literature contains very few such descriptions, there is a need, especially for those who may be about to teach "content-based" linked courses for the first time, to review what others have done in order to stimulate ideas for their own teaching practice.

Hence, this paper addresses two lacunae: the dearth of material on "content-based" linked courses, and the absence of detailed descriptive writing on curriculum design and development for "content-based" linked courses.

Methods

Participants

The sixty full-time undergraduate, traditional-age, first-year university students who comprised the study were enrolled in three sections of the Christian Tradition-Global History link. Two sections were offered in the fall 2004 semester while one section was offered in the spring 2005 semester. Fifty-four students were present in class on the respective dates when the demographic information and linked course evaluation forms were administered. Demographic information focused upon gender, living arrangements and majors as indicated in the tables below.

Measures

A key component of a liberal arts education is to establish links across the curriculum. The objective is to break the tendency to view each subject as monolithic and detached from others, and to allow the students to realize the connections between various disciplines. LaSalle University's Doubles Program achieves this by pairing a variety of required introductory-level courses. The Double (a pair of linked courses) at LaSalle is mandatory during the first year in order to introduce students to interdisciplinary education early in their university life, and to lay a foundation for their academic careers. Doubles classes are kept small in order to promote student/instructor interaction as well as a sense of community. Twenty first-year students are enrolled in each of the two courses. It is the responsibility of both the religion and the history professors to teach their courses in ways that link subject matter. This essay presents one possible model for establishing such connections in "content-based" linked courses. At the same time, it seeks to explore the worthwhileness of primary source readings as means to enable students to experience

some interdisciplinary connections between religion and history as academic subjects in the core curriculum.

In this paper, a course dealing with the development of Christianity is paired with one covering major themes in Global History. In addition to highlighting points in which

Table 1. Demographic Information

Gender

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	19	35%
Female	35	65%
Total	54	100%

Living Arrangements

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Resident	45	83%
Commuter	9	17%
Total	54	100%

General Description of Majors

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Business: accounting, business, finance or management	23	43%
Education: elementary, special, with American Studies or with English	20	37%
Other: biology, criminal justice, nursing, social work or undecided	11	20%
Total	54	100%

these two topics intersect, the instructors place emphasis upon cultivating the students' abilities to read, think, speak and write critically and analytically, as opposed to merely memorizing course material.

Their linked teaching is characterized by mutual respect, excellence in pedagogy, good humor, and interest in students. In addition, their dialogue with one another, in the presence of the students, aims to model the kind of academic conversation in which students can also engage with one another. Such qualities are somewhat infectious and have served over time to communicate a mutual enthusiasm for student reports both spoken and written. The high energy the professors are continuing to develop serves as a significant motivating influence for the students. While, as of this writing, the authors can only offer their impressions, it would appear that students in the linked courses often, but not always, are more comfortable with group oral reports and individual writing assignments

than are their counterparts in stand-alone courses. The greater comfort may be indicative of greater facility and mastery of the requisite skills. This impression is confirmed by a recent set of course evaluations in which the students specifically express the desire to engage in a greater number of group activities, characterized by research-based dialogue, during which both professors would be present. Thus, the goals of reading, thinking, speaking and writing--critically and analytically--seem to be significantly enhanced by the framework provided through the linked courses.

Co-ordination before the start of the term, usually during the preceding semester, served logistical purposes. It was during the first of these preliminary discussions that the professors chose to utilize short primary sources as foundations for the common assignments. It was out of this conversation that the principal research question developed. How can primary source texts in religion and history, focused through the lenses of critical pedagogical processes, enable first year university students to understand and to make intellectual connections between two linked courses (representing two different academic disciplines) in the core curriculum?

Very worthwhile anthologies of edited readings, thematically grouped, were readily available for classroom use. Two were selected; each contained a helpful introduction to each unit of readings in the collection. In addition, there were accessible introductions to each specific selection in the two anthologies. *A Cloud of Witnesses: Readings in the History of Western Christianity* (Harrington, 2001) offered fine contextual material for each individual reading. *The Human Record: Sources of Global History: Volume II Since 1500* (Andrea & Overfield, 2005) followed a nearly identical format, but added critical questions at the end of each piece to aid student understanding of material. Selections from each of these anthologies were used in order actualize the primary source interdisciplinary focus of the two linked courses.

During the first preliminary planning session for the religion-history link, the two professors also determined that group presentations would be a major aspect of their Double. The second research question arose: what learning processes enable students to work productively with primary sources in the religion and history interdisciplinary curriculum? Ideas derived from *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life* (Paul & Elder, 2001) proved to be pertinent in directing students to consider material from critical points of view. For example, it was necessary to direct students to note the author's purpose in writing, or implications of the reading, particularly as they related to history or religion. Since the students were to be working in study groups, *Active Learning: Cooperative Learning in the College Classroom* (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991) proved beneficial in setting guidelines for the composition and functioning of the groups. In addition, *The Wisdom of Teams* (Katzenbach, 1994) from the field of business provided hints for motivation and problem-solving in team situations. Each of these resources was both substantive and practical in enabling the professors to strategize in the minute details of implementing the religion-history Double. Finally, "Changing Students' Attitudes: Writing Fellows Programs" (Haring-Smith in McLeod & Soven, 1992) demonstrated how an integrated use of reading and writing as-

signments can lead to deep student learning; this material was helpful in planning some of the writing assignments formulated in the teaching of the religion-history Double.

Procedures

Content

The themes of the Reformation, the Enlightenment and Religion, and Christianity in the Modern Era were selected for the Christian Tradition course. Similarly, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Modern Era were chosen for the Global History course. These three units constituted the framework for the development of the "links" between the two "content-based" courses.

The process of planning required both professors to decide how to structure their courses in order to make them conducive for linking with each other. This led the professors to deviate from ways in which they would traditionally present material. For example, a thematic approach to Global History allowed for more opportunities to make connections with Christianity than a strictly chronological format would have done.

Goals

In teaching the Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic, the religion instructor had two major goals in mind for the students. The students were to become acquainted with some of the reformers as human persons with qualities of leadership and genuine human struggles. They should also have developed a sense of "the church," an institution which embodies and teaches Christian beliefs and principles, and yet is comprised of human persons who bring both strengths and limitations to their roles as leaders. Excerpts from Martin Luther's "Table Talk;" The Council of Trent's "Decrees;" John Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion;" Ignatius Loyola's "Spiritual Exercises;" and John and Charles Wesley's "Collection of Hymns" comprised the Reformation focus in the "Christian Tradition-Global History" link (Andrea & Overfield, 2005; Harrington, 2001).

One study group of students read Luther's "Table Talk" and developed its presentation. While the reading was just a few pages long, it contained a number of examples in which Luther pointed to irony and contradiction in the church. Most first year university students tend not to notice the subtlety in Luther's thinking. The critical thinking tools contained in the classroom process for the "Christian Tradition-Global History" link helped to direct students towards an understanding of the criticism implied in Luther's words. The critical thinking tools discussed below provide the professors with language through which they encouraged students to think deeply about what they were reading in relation to what they already knew, such as background material covered in both the religion and the history courses. Some students did then grasp the deeper significance of Luther's words.

Introducing students to the ways in which the leaders of the Protestant Reformation defied the church and the papacy and examining how the church responded to these chal-

lenges during the Counter-Reformation were basic goals of the Global History course. The prominent role of the church in Europe during the late Medieval and Renaissance periods was covered in class lectures and discussions. Luther's writing presented clear challenges to the concepts and practices endorsed by the church during that time. This primary source reading brought the historical dialogue to life for the students and highlighted the theme of revolutionary thought versus established order. Furthermore, the Luther reading provided evidence for students to consider when they were required to express in writing their own understanding of how the ideas of the Reformation challenged the church and the papacy.

The formation of community is one of the goals in the LaSalle University core curriculum, particularly in the "Doubles." The class size in the linked courses is smaller than in most core courses, and the students are together for six credit hours during the semester, rather than the three hours of a traditional course.

While the formation of community was not an explicitly stated and strategized goal of this "Double," both professors fostered a group dynamic, which included teamwork and which was sometimes characterized by humor. The group dynamic, teamwork, respect, interest in students, and good humor were, for the most part, a way of being and an outgrowth of the mutual collaboration between the professors. However, the professors took advantage of the option provided in the LaSalle University Doubles Program to take the students to visit The Franklin Institute and The Constitution Center, two cultural centers in Philadelphia. While not directly connected with course content, these educational sites provided students and professors alike with food for thought and discussion. In addition, these two trips taught some students how to utilize public transportation to visit places of interest in the city. Furthermore, the trips provided a venue for social interaction, so that some of the students developed an "esprit de corps" which deepened a bit as the semester continued. This dynamic contributed to a sense of community. Both professors favored a spirit of community among the students and professors as a by-product of their interdisciplinary collaboration. At the same time, both professors were very intentional in their efforts towards excellence in pedagogy; the focus of this article is to describe their strategies.

Through the "content-based" religion-history link students grappled with material generated by Reformation theologians. At the same time they considered some of the historical issues which surfaced during the Reformation. They entered into the religious and historical experience of the Reformation. Through guided use of critical thinking processes they interacted with some of the great persons whose minds contributed to its development.

Critical Pedagogical Processes

In order to cultivate students' rhetorical, critical and analytical skills, a class period during the first week of the semester was set aside for the purpose of introducing the concept of the Double to the students. Both instructors explained the value of the Doubles Program at LaSalle University and the goals and objectives for their Double; these were also

spelled out in each professor's syllabus. An emphasis was placed upon interdisciplinary education and critical and analytical thinking, as well as upon explaining the significance of primary sources in studying the past. This time was also used to establish five study groups of four students each. These groupings stood for the remainder of the semester in order to allow time for the strong group dynamic to develop. The groups were directed to read primary sources pertaining to topics covered during the term together, to synthesize their ideas, and to present their findings to the rest of the class. Examples of the assignment are given above for the unit on the Reformation. Each group of students was directed to prepare a ten-minute presentation on its assigned primary source reading by a designated date. The Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic, was covered in the religion and history classes in the meantime.

The groups each divided their presentation into four tasks, one for each member of the group. One student summarized the reading. While the focus was on summary of content, the student also provided biographical information about the author and the author's purpose in writing.

Another student identified the main points of the reading. This student noted especially significant concepts and drew attention to assumptions implicit in the reading. Consideration of significant concepts and assumptions required the student to move from concrete thinking to a more abstract level. Assumptions can be subtle, particularly for a first year university student; instructors can sometimes offer helpful guidance.

A third student tied the reading to topics and themes treated in both classes. He or she contextualized the reading and made connections between the primary source reading and the two courses.

A final student drew a conclusion that reflected the group's reaction to the reading. The conclusion included comments as to why the reading was important, some inferences taken from the reading, connections to other aspects of knowledge or recent events, and/or one's own opinion of the reading with a rationale for the opinion. Development of the conclusion often led to a more sophisticated level of abstract thinking

Both professors found that generally speaking, students presented their findings more extensively and with greater confidence when they were given a structure upon which to base their presentation. The structure, designed and honed over the course of eight semesters of experience, was derived from literature on co-operative learning, team development and critical thinking (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991; Katzenbach, 1994; Paul & Elder, 2001). Students were encouraged to assume different roles in presenting each report, so that during the course of the semester each student had the opportunity to approach a primary source from a different vantage point. Such rotation of responsibilities allowed students to think about the source material in different ways. Further, a student who had a little experience with one intellectual perspective was in a good position to teach another who was trying the particular critical thinking skill for the first time in a formal setting. Students indicated that occasionally the primary source readings were incomprehensible; however, when each member of the group communicated his or her par-

ticular findings about the reading to the others, the combined knowledge resulted in the ability to grasp and interpret the reading and its relevance for one or both courses. One group of students indicated that this experience of group probing of the significance of a text had been exhilarating. They had experienced an "aha" moment. This cooperative, team-based, critically structured approach provided students with tools for learning and enabled them to become agents in their own education. They became more proficient as the semester progressed. In addition, they developed a collaborative style and sometimes ease in working together.

Within Course Assessment

Both instructors were with the students during the presentations, provided feedback from religious and historical perspectives, and highlighted any key points that were overlooked by the groups. The remaining class time was allotted for discussion. Evaluating the presentations involved assessing how well each group actualized its four tasks as described above. The mechanics of the presentation: organization, voice projection, pronunciation and enunciation of words, eye contact, and ability to speak in an engaged manner to the listeners were also assessed.

Each instructor provided an independent evaluation of each student's work. Ordinarily the students in a given study group received the same grade, except when it was evident that a particular student's contribution should be evaluated differently. The work done on the Doubles presentations comprised fifteen to twenty percent of the final grade given in each of the two courses, Christian Tradition and Global History.

The next component of the assessment exercise was a writing assignment calling for each student to incorporate his or her group's findings into an essay of two to three pages. The students were presented with a question that required them to use evidence from their group's primary source reading to support a thesis of their own.

For example, in religion, a writing assignment related to Martin Luther's "Table Talk" was as follows:

Luther believed in the importance of faith in God's love and grace, particularly as demonstrated by the life, death and saving love of Jesus. He spoke out against many examples of what he considered to be false teachings and ways of living in the church.

As you reflect upon "Table Talk," select one example of Luther's criticism of the church. Explain what Luther seemed to be saying and describe how the context of the times in which he was living shed light upon the deeper meaning of his comments.

For example, do you think that Luther was merely calling for a return to the simple direct faith Jesus taught his first followers? Or, on the other hand, do you think that Luther's criticism is unduly strident and perhaps out of order? These are

merely suggestions. Develop your own statement of what you think Luther is saying. Explain your reasons.

Conclude your paper by describing how working on it has helped to you understand the Reformation. The paper is to be between two and three pages long and according to the usual MLA format as described in the syllabus.

In history, each student was asked to explain how his or her group's reading represented an important moment in the development of Christianity during the Reformation. The class was cautioned against providing long summaries and narratives in their essays in order to insure that their essays reflected the students' critical and analytical thinking and writing skills. The writing assignments were graded primarily on each student's ability to use evidence from primary sources in order to construct an argument.

Since students had previously worked with members of their study groups in probing the meaning of the primary source readings, they had developed, through their collaborative experience, a sense of the material. While each student's writing assignment was completed independently, students had the option to consult one another as their short essays took shape. Despite the fact all of the students were first year students, they enjoyed some of the same benefits which accrue to peer tutoring situations. Most particularly, they did indeed "explore ways in which writing and learning are connected" (Haring-Smith, 1992).

While this method of linking courses enabled students to understand common themes through thinking, reading, discussion, and writing, it also permitted multifaceted avenues for assessment. Through presentation, discussion and writing related to the Reformation readings, students came to understand the nature and necessity of reform and to note the theme of reform. Further, they were able to identify and explain some of the specific significant Protestant and Catholic efforts towards reform. In particular they were able to grasp differing theological perspectives, on the Eucharist, which developed during the Reformation. They were able to note different styles of reform and the differing concepts of the role of authority during a time of reform. They understood the differing approaches to authority within the Protestant and Catholic denominations, and they were able to explain the origins of these differences. In the practical realm, students developed a deeper understanding of approaches to the Christian tradition which differ from their own. In addition, students were able to explain how a religious perspective on events illumines the historical, and similarly, they were able to explain how the historical perspective grounds the religious. Hence, they understood how many aspects of knowledge have the potential to be connected, one with another, Finally, students were able to propose models for reformation, which could be implemented in contemporary times.

By the end of the entire exercise, each student has read a primary source, covered its context in both courses, contemplated its content and related issues, presented on it with his or her group, received feedback from both instructors, and written on it independently of the group. This allowed for a multi-sensory learning experience, catering to the needs of

all types of learners. Furthermore, this model fostered a high level of interaction among the students and with the instructors.

The Christian Tradition-Global History "content-based" linked courses embedded criteria for assessment into their structure through expectations articulated for the speaking and writing assignments. The presence of the criteria for assessment of student learning provided a framework through which students demonstrated the depth and breadth to which they appropriated course material in order to construct their own knowledge.

Analyses

The research design for this project is loosely modeled around a descriptive case study format as explicated by John W. Creswell (1998, 2003). Having articulated the need for the study and its purpose, this report focused upon its central research question with respect to the helpfulness of primary source texts as means for connecting first year university religion and history linked courses. Then the report described the methods used with a narrative description of participants, measures and pedagogical procedures.

This portion of the report outlines the forms of analyses utilized to obtain the results of the study. A major portion of analysis is derived from two written evaluative tasks put to students towards the end of each semester by the LaSalle University Office of Institutional Research. Repetitive patterns within the wording of the tasks served a triangulating function. This major portion of the analysis is transcribed in this report in a form similar to that used by the George Mason University Office of Institutional Assessment, for purposes of discussion later in this article. Those areas having greater degrees of agreement among the students are listed at the top of each table. A minor, yet significant, aspect of analysis points to some emerging themes in the student responses. Finally while member-checking yielded just two responses, these responses do, in fact, serve to validate the study.

The final portion of this report relates results of this project to findings in recently retrieved literature. It also indicates some lessons learned and a direction for the future.

Results

While the professors evaluated each student's spoken and written presentations during the course of the semester, students were also given opportunities to evaluate the experience of the linked courses. Towards the end of the courses, students were asked by the Office of Institutional Research at LaSalle University to complete a survey. In addition, one of the professors did some member-checking with a few of the students.

The Office of Institutional Research asked students to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the linked (Doubles) courses. They were also asked to rate the linked courses in comparison to other required courses they have taken at LaSalle. Some of the main findings are shown in Table 2. Finally students in two classes were asked some additional questions.

The 38 students in the fall 2004 sections of the linked courses were also asked what they liked most about the Double, what should be done differently to enhance the Doubles experience, and what they liked least about the Doubles courses. While most of the comments were unique to their authors, a few themes emerged. The material indicated below, in response to these two questions, was extrapolated from the students' comments.

With respect to the question: "What should be done differently to enhance the Doubles experience?" 24% offered substantive comments and all of those who commented indicated that aspects of the Doubles experience should be replicated more frequently within the linked courses.

Two different groups of three students suggested more combined classes (having both professors simultaneously present) and more group work (within both the separate courses and the learning activities of the linked experiences). In addition, individual students identified joint course learning activities beyond the presentations, and more connections between and within courses as ways to enhance the Doubles experience.

Member-checking was done one year after the linked courses had taken place. A few students were contacted by e-mail. As often occurs with member-checking (Creswell, 1998), the response rate was small. At the same time, the two respondents wrote thoughtfully.

When asked if his experience in the Double helped him to realize interdisciplinary links in courses that he has taken since, Sean Thomas Henry replied, "Yes, I regularly see many recurring themes and ideas in many different classes." George Attah-Asante answered, "Yes, my experience in the Double helped me realize the interdisciplinary links in other courses. I never realized that history played such an important role in the church. I came to realize that many changes that went on in the church were based on what happened in history."

When asked if his experience in the Double enhanced his ability to think critically and analytically in courses that he has taken since, Attah-Asante claimed that "My experience has helped me to break out of one-sided thinking and think in multidimensional terms."

These results generally affirm an interactive application of critical thinking skills to the reading of primary sources as an effective means of developing curricular links between the religion course and the history course. The results also suggest possibilities for future directions in curriculum development for the Christian Tradition-Global History linked courses.

Discussion

This report affirms that an interactive application of critical thinking skills to the reading of primary source texts in linked religion and history courses clearly enables students to make the curricular connections between the two academic disciplines. Students made such comments as "It was kind of like learning things twice but just at a different angle,

Table 2. Survey Results

Degree of Agreement with Statement about the Linked Courses, (54 students)

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Professors seemed to work well together.	39%	44%	83%
Connections between courses were clear.	37%	46%	83%
The Doubles courses helped me understand connections between the subjects.	30%	43%	73%
Courses were a good learning experience.	35%	37%	72%
Reading and writing assignments helped me to achieve the goals of the courses.	22%	46%	68%
Joint classes helped to achieve the goals.	24%	43%	67%
The Doubles format helped me learn the subject matter.	19%	43%	62%
I got to see relationships I would not have realized if I took each course separately.	28%	28%	56%

Rating Aspects of Linked Courses in Comparison to Other Required Courses Taken at LaSalle, (54 students)

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Much Better</i>	<i>Somewhat Better</i>	<i>Total</i>
Helping you work with fellow students	28%	46%	74%
Allowing you to appreciate different perspectives	11%	46%	57%
Helping you integrate ideas	13%	44%	57%
Fostering student interactions	20%	36%	56%
Allowing you to think critically	19%	35%	54%
Allowing you to interpret ideas	24%	30%	54%
Engaging you in the learning process	16%	37%	53%
Helping you retain what you learned	13%	37%	50%
Challenging your thinking	6%	44%	50%
Helping you evaluate ideas	13%	35%	48%
Deepening your interest in subject matter	7%	39%	46%

What did you like most about the Doubles courses? (28 students)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Curricular connectedness and inter-relatedness of courses	37%
The group work and/or joint classes with presentations	34%

What did you like least about the Doubles courses? (28 students)

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Assignments (i.e., writing a paper, 3; giving a presentation, 2; lack of clarity, 2; joint assignments, same one for both classes)	24%
Teaching styles (i.e., not on same topic, 3; same material in both classes, 2; differences in style, 2; insufficient time together in classroom, 2)	24%

so you remembered it better;" "Both classes taught similar subjects but from different perspectives; and "The group work created a bond between classmates we might not have had." In some respects the findings resemble those of Kutnowski (2005) who stresses the importance of "combining interdisciplinary and critical thinking with encouragement for social negotiation in the classroom" in order to "help students better understand the class content and feel more engaged in the college experience." Kutnowski, like the authors of this article, writes from the perspective of two "content-based" linked courses (in his case, Music of the Twentieth Century and Art Layout and Design, at Queensborough Community College in New York City). Like Kutnowski, the present authors taught thematically, yet they also retained a basic chronology in order to address, at least partially, the knowledge domain gap articulated by E.D. Hirsh and discussed by Kutnowski. The authors agree with Kutnowski that the time and effort required to engage students in the learning process prevents professors from addressing all of the gaps in the knowledge domain of the students. However, they also agree that the content and pedagogy of the linked courses, taught through a thematic approach, enables students to engage in "more active learning," and to "gain a new perspective on the value of collaboration and the connections between disciplines." (Kutnowski, 2005). Kutnowski's findings are supportive of the authors' conviction.

The results in this report on the delivery of linked courses in religion and history bear some similarities to the findings of the Office of Institutional Assessment of George Mason University (1998). In both cases students generally stressed the importance of enhanced curricular connections as well as the formation of academic and social community in their linked courses. Interestingly enough, the percentages of the total number of responses in agreement with statements on the evaluative questionnaire at each institution were nearly identical: 83% to 46% on one survey, and 83% to 37% on another.

Another similarity is that the institutional office of each university reported specifically on the same two most appealing features of their students' linked courses: the learning connections (37% at one university, 25% at the other) and the community support they offered (37% at one university, (27%) at the other. These similarities are striking in view of the fact that LaSalle's student cohort consisted of 54 students who were responding to one "content-based" link. On the other hand 342 George Mason University students were responding to a variety of "content-based" and "content-application" links.

Gammill & Hanson (1991) indicate that the primary link between their three (one "content-based" matched with two "application") courses was through the assignments. Students were to apply material from the economics course to the use of library resources and computer software to their economics course. Somewhat differently, authors of the LaSalle study stressed both the in-class presentations and their related writing assignments. However, the findings in the LaSalle study indicate the importance of greater clarity in instructions for assignments and also a slight lack of student interest in preparing both presentations and written assignments. This new knowledge equips the professors to strategize with respect to assignments in their future linked courses.

It is not possible to know if the 24% of LaSalle students who wanted more combined classes, group work, joint class learning activities, and connections between courses are the same 24% who identified teaching styles as the area they liked least. In any case, at least 24% and perhaps as many as 48% are asking for something more. This finding corroborates the thinking of both professors with respect to enhancing the learning experience. In fact, the professors have come to the conclusion that more time spent together with students in the classroom has potential for a richer learning experience for the students.

Both professors have also received the impression from some students that more time should be spent in group activities and discussion in the presence of both professors. The experience of professors and students in the Christian Tradition-Global History Double exemplifies the statement of Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews & Smith (1990) that

Regardless of the level of initial involvement, the faculty and students in most learning communities inevitably move toward more collaboration. This is so because the structure is a curricular vehicle for intellectual, social, and political synergy. Learning community constituents examine texts, ideas, experiences, and feelings within a group context and the public nature of this learning compels connection, reflection and revision. Students develop a sense of their own authority.

Conclusion

This article describes the construction and implementation of The Christian Tradition and Global History from the Reformation to the Present, "content-based" linked courses in LaSalle University core curriculum. In addition to contributing to the literature on "content-based" linked courses, the article demonstrates the theory and actual practice involved in a particular pair of linked courses. There is a clear attempt to link curricular content and goals with specific learning activities and forms of pedagogy appropriate to the levels of thinking of first year university students. Forms of assessment are integrated into the learning activities and styles of pedagogy in such a manner as to incorporate substantive content into the processes of thinking and learning. The findings point to lessons from the recent past and to directions for the future.

This paper on a "content-based" link carries with it a substantive body of knowledge and a variety of scholarly tools for engaging with and constructing interdisciplinary forms of knowledge. Some of these scholarly tools are interdisciplinary, i.e., the perspective of the theologian or the historian, as well as the skills of critical thinking as outlined above in the criteria for presentation and writing. Other tools include organization and the mechanics of spoken/written presentation, again as outlined above. The design described in this article for a "content-based" link suggests models which can be developed for other "content-based" linked courses in the learning community. The authors concur with Gabelnick et al. (1990) that "the learning community structure offers great opportunities for creativity, but also a nest of concerns." They also agree that "the experience of beginning a

learning community is a little like being given a wad of clay that must be worked with and softened before it is pliable enough to take shape."

At the same time, the development of one model only serves to stimulate thinking and creativity towards the construction and development of future designs for linked courses. For example, the authors are beginning to explore the possibilities of student debates based upon the use of primary sources which relate to issues in religion and/or history. They are also investigating a new curriculum design in which they would spend more time together in the classroom with the students. Such explorations as those suggested here carry within themselves the seeds of new energy and inspiration for faculty development into the future. In addition, the outcomes can provide an enhanced learning experience for students in the linked courses.

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