About the program

The program offers access to resources and activities in the Academic Learning Transformation Lab and service-learning experiences through the Division of Community Engagement while providing networking opportunities with students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines, as well as discipline-specific areas of study.

Since most courses are one or two credits, students are able to easily add them into their academic program schedules. For students who complete all course requirements, the capstone course is an internship/externship experience during which the student is mentored by a senior faculty member.

PFF courses may be taken individually or as part of the Preparing Future Faculty in the Professions certification module, which places special emphasis on preparing faculty for positions in professional schools.

“'The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.'

Martin Luther King, Jr.
How attending an interdisciplinary college teaching conference immediately impacted my classroom practices

Rachel Yoho

As a scientist and science education researcher, I never expected to find innovations and strategies for my classroom from diverse areas such as sociology, physical geography, education, and community studies. Now I realize, why look for teaching ideas practiced only within my discipline? Interdisciplinary college teaching conferences provide an opportunity to explore different ideas and apply them somewhere new.

While academia is traditionally partitioned into disciplines, research interests (for example, sustainability) are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Additionally, the scholarship of teaching and learning has made great advancements in recent years. The focus on educational outcomes and active learning techniques is taking center stage, and the advent of discipline-based educational societies has created a number of supportive, collaborative communities within the sciences. However, cross-talk often appears limited. Beyond the organized societies and learning communities on campus, how often do we “talk shop” with faculty outside of our area?

As a participant in Miami University’s New Faculty Teaching Enhancement Program, I had just that opportunity, talking all semester with faculty across various disciplines. Even casual conversations inspired me with new teaching strategies and innovations. Through the teaching program, I gained registration to attend the Lilly Conference. This conference had a profound and immediate impact on my teaching practices, perhaps more so than even a discipline-based education conference would.

Here are some examples of insights from other disciplines:

From the writing and languages faculty:

Science students write—whether research papers, lab reports, or open response questions, they express their thoughts through writing. I attended talks about academic writing by faculty from literature and writing departments, which focused on how to create engaging writing assignments and how to provide worthwhile, realistic feedback. Going beyond the regurgitation of information, the writing faculty provided insights on creative ways to inspire students to write and improve their writing. These talks, directly or indirectly, discussed the cognitive demands of writing. Basically, this encourages students to try out non-traditional, engaging writing styles and provide real-world feedback on their products. Overall, who would be better to help improve science students’ writing than writing faculty presenting their best practices? These techniques are helping me to transform writing assignments from classroom learning experiences into professional development opportunities.

From education and community studies faculty:

How do you teach inquiry? How do you teach an experience? Experts in teaching future educators and practitioners showed insights on the processes used to engage students in their disciplines. These talks about science teacher education and field experience classes gave theoretical background and practical classroom activities. One key lesson, for example, was helping students observe and ask questions of the world around them. Now, I have more ways to spark students’ interest and help them understand the process of inquiry. These ideas are translating well especially to community engagement lessons. Questioning, active listening, and self-reflection follow many of the structured ideas of field experience classes in other disciplines.

The process of reflecting on teaching:

Attending a conference towards the end of the semester made reflecting on the teaching process particularly relevant. Presenters from sociology and physical geography discussed strategies for reflecting on a course and revising it for next time. Focusing on specific reflective tasks at different time scales for reflection (daily, unit, and end-of-course), provide unique looks at how to improve the process of teaching and learning. I already knew that I should actually be writing down my thoughts on what to modify or improve for next time. Going far beyond this, I now have several concrete plans for collecting anecdotal data on what worked and what didn’t for next time. These plans focus on my reflections and my students’ observations at specific points during the semester. These points center on key concepts and important stages in the course sequence. Building a more focused structure within my reflection is already facilitating the upcoming course revision timeline. With these plans, I am creating action items which I hope will improve both my teaching and my students’ learning.

Online education:

As more university-level education moves to the online environment, teaching and learning strategies that can be adapted for or used in online classrooms become increasingly important. Talks about experiential online learning and discussions pondered such nuances as student-generated content, the discussion timeline, and expectations. These talks explored the cognitive demands for students creating materials and taking on an instruction-like role in the dialogue. The perspectives from online educa-
tion in other areas (here, pharmacy and education) showed the common ground amongst our fields. Regardless of content area, we are seeking to implement activities that help our students develop competencies and skills. In this case, the delivery method – online – united individuals representing vastly different disciplines.

Generalizable lessons from the sciences:

While the majority of the talks I attended were from faculty from other fields, broadly applicable talks from the sciences were also represented. For example, one discussed how to adopt a process for helping students read scientific literature. Importantly, reading scientific literature is a skill that can be developed with practice. Unfortunately for most researchers, our practice was so long ago that we’ve forgotten what it’s like. Another group, representing the disciplines of geology, molecular biology, and botany, talked about students’ metacognition and behavioral science implications. These talks inspired ideas, not based on disciplinary content, but instead on widely applicable competencies and skills that unite different fields of study.

Considering teaching strategies and practices from other fields has inspired changes that I’m implementing this semester in the classroom. In general, adopting teaching strategies from different disciplines may facilitate more rapid innovation in the classroom. Open communication drives innovation in departments on every part of a campus. Thinking outside of your own subspecialty – or even field – through participation in an interdisciplinary university teaching conference might inspire new ideas in educational research or teaching! Research conferences and discipline-based education conferences are advantageous choices for research updates, developing connections, and working with collaborators. College teaching conferences, however, provide vastly different perspectives and even potential collaborators across disciplines. Perhaps this conference was timed well for me to adopt new teaching ideas. I can’t say for sure. What I know is that I have another entry on my conference attendance wish-list. While I probably won’t be implementing every idea I heard, I have ambitious plans to use other disciplines’ techniques in my classes for years to come.

This article was retrieved from https://blogs.plos.org/thestudentblog/2018/04/06/how-attending-an-interdisciplinary-college-teaching-conference-immediately-impacted-my-classroom-practices/

References


Anna Maria Behler is currently in her fourth year of the Social Psychology Ph.D. program. Her research interests include self and identity with a focus on how a person’s identity influences their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Anna Maria hopes to become a faculty member at a university with a teaching focus.

1. What does the PFF Program mean to you?

The PFF program was a chance for me to learn more about the career path I plan to pursue, all while in a fun and educational environment. It was also an opportunity for me to think carefully about what I hope my own pedagogical style will be as a faculty member.

2. How did your experience in the PFF program enhance your understanding of what it means to be faculty and impact your plans for a career in academia?

The PFF courses I took exposed me to information I never knew I needed! We don’t often hear or even think about the finer details of what being a faculty member entails, but I learned so much about these things in the classes I took. Some of my assignments involved interviewing different faculty members within my department, and I learned so much from these synthesizing these conversations along with class discussions.

3. Tell us about your internship experience and the impact the project and mentoring relationship had on you?

Seeing how a seasoned faculty member leads a course was a truly valuable experience. It is so different seeing a course from this perspective rather than just seeing it as a student. I was able to notice and appreciate all of the care and effort that had gone into designing the course. My mentor even allowed me the opportunity to guest lecture and create my own course materials. I now feel prepared to teach a brand new course because of her mentorship during this semester!

4. What advice would you give to students currently enrolled in the PFF program?

Make the most of this opportunity by forming connections with your peers from other departments. I really appreciated the perspectives of the students from other disciplines, because they thought of their experiences in the classroom in a different way than I did, and I feel that I learned so much from them.