



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Connecting General Education Content and CTE: Collaboration is Key

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In response to complaints from students and faculty that general education courses did not seem relevant to our career and technical population, Hawkeye Community College underwent a paradigm shift to focus on creating relevance between CTE program classes and general education requirements. This paradigm shift began with a school in-service presentation that posed two questions: If you are a CTE faculty member, how can you better support Gen Ed students? If you are a Gen Ed instructor, how can you better tailor assignments and course information to CTE students? The answers to these two questions guided the creation of a collaborative curriculum between our Oral Communication and Composition courses specifically for CTE students, focusing on direct connections between both courses and the CTE program itself.

Collaboration and Assignment Explanation

The same group of career and technical students take our Oral Communication and Composition courses concurrently. We integrate connections to the students' individual programs throughout the semester. We also use open educational resources to ensure course materials are accessible. The Composition and Oral Communication courses each have four major assignments, which we sequenced and scaffolded in tandem with one another. Students research a topic connected with their program, which ensures that it is relevant and interesting to them, write a paper, and give oral presentations. They become experts on their topic over the course of the term.

Benefits for Students and Faculty

The student advantages to this collaboration are numerous. First, because of the use of open educational resources, there are no textbook costs. Additionally, students can see assignment continuity between our classes and their program classes. They are also able to complete two general education courses in one semester in a way that doesn't feel like two separate classes. Finally, there is a stronger sense of support for students when we collaborate than if they had simply taken the classes separately. They are part of a learning community of their peers and are supported throughout the process by both of us, as well as by their program instructors, who help contribute ideas to our assignment requirements. Students are more engaged

and more likely to persist in non-program classes when they see how the content connects to their CTE courses. We also benefit when our students are engaged because they participate more often and more meaningfully.

Partnering with another teacher also helps keep content fresh and applicable. After so many years in the field, it's easy to fall into ruts of doing things the same way semester after semester. This collaboration forces a shake up and brings seasoned instructors new challenges and approaches to meeting their student learning outcomes.

Finally, CTE and Ged Ed instructors feel supported. CTE instructors feel heard and there's a newfound mutual respect on our campus that previously did not exist. In order to encourage content connections for students, instructors need to know about current topics in their areas. That involves continuous communication with CTE faculty and directly involves them with our classes.

Challenges

As with any new course design, there are some challenges to overcome as you plan to collaborate at your school. Scheduling can be difficult. We needed to find times (1) that didn't overlap with students' program classes, (2) when students were on campus, and (3) that worked with our schedules. We also needed to make sure that people were aware of what we were doing and spend time marketing our courses to get students enrolled. This all takes time, but we felt like it was a very worthwhile investment.

Conclusion

Through our paired courses, we hope career and technical students better see the connections between their program content and general education courses, and persist through to degree completion. Teaching collaborative courses offers a challenging yet rewarding experience. There are also many exciting possibilities for variation. Schools could pair a career and technical course with a general education course, for example, and students could see direct application between the two courses. Student needs are changing and it's important for many reasons that we find ways to help meet those needs.

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