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## Honors First-Year Curriculum Institute Reflection

Hadia Bendelhoum

hadia.bendelhoum@csusb.edu

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Hadia Nouria Bendelhoum

Honors First-Year Curriculum Institute Reflection

California State University, San Bernardino

### Honors First-Year Curriculum Institute Reflection

When rethinking the curriculum for the General Education courses in the Honors program, an interdisciplinary and integrative approach was taken. This proved incredibly beneficial for such courses that tend to be thought of as completely separate units. Over the course of a week, three different disciplines from the Honors GE courses met to discuss the design of said courses. These courses, Writing Rhetorically (104A changing to 1100), Thinking Critically (104B to 1200) and Communication Orally (104C to 1300), brought together a small group of instructors from each of the following disciplines; Communication Studies, English, and Philosophy. During this time, we went from small discussion circles, to discipline-specific and task-driven group work, to full discussions on readings to discuss the direction in mind for these courses. We were able to create a master document with the detailed comments on the curriculum, below is a brief summary of the most salient points discussed.

A question that really guided a lot of what we discussed was “what sets apart the Honors GE courses from the regular ones we teach year-round?” While an easy answer could be that we simply require more assignments and expect more collaboration from students, there is something to be said for the type of experience the Honor’s program offers. These Honors GE courses offered different content and material, but we found that there was overlap in many of the major concepts that we each taught within our respective disciplines. From hearing students posit that they learned Aristotle’s proofs in their critical thinking course while learning this in the public speaking course for a persuasive speech, and in their writing course for rhetoric purposes. A lot of the same concepts are taught in each of these courses but applied in different ways. The question was, how are we to make it so that students are able to use those concepts and allow them to build off of each other. How could we make it so that when a student learns about ethics

in their critical thinking course, they can easily apply that to using ethics in public speaking and such? Promoting a higher order of thinking, an integrative and collaborative learning between the respective courses through concepts that build upon each other is part of the experience Honors GE courses provide. We found that the best ways to emulate this unique experience was to create reflection prompts, themed assignments that build off of each other, and a senior portfolio to compile it all.

A major goal was for us to be able to effectively promote some form of metacognition for our students. Guiding most of our discussion about this was Schraw (1998) who explained this as an individual's knowledge of their own cognition. A huge component of this is for one to reflect on their own learning. Therefore, as a group we produced a bank of reflection prompts to be distributed in the respective courses. These prompts asked questions such as "how do you know you have learned something?" prompting students to truly reflect on their ability to learn and whether or not they truly learned something. We felt that such reflections would encourage students to actively reflect on their own learning and in turn make these connections between their courses. Having such unison amongst these three courses would allow students to take major concepts to use as tools to apply them elsewhere in the future. To further implement integrative learning, we discussed the idea of a theme of some sorts to allow students to examine topics from various lenses. For example, if a theme across all three courses would allow a student who wrote a paper for their critical thinking or writing course could then use what they learned about this topic to then build upon that and further their knowledge in their public speaking course. This would then make for impressive assignments they could add to a final senior portfolio. These assignments would exhibit the higher order of thinking they were able to

apply, further demonstrating the progression of their knowledge applied from one class to another.

As previously stated, these GEs are thought of as different units and are more often than not treated as such. Through this week-long institute we were able to discuss ways in which we could create more of an integrative learning experience for first year Honors student. We had three solidified ideas of reflection prompts, scaffolded assignments, and an eventual portfolio to showcase student learning. We are confident that the implementation such ideas would truly reflect the uniqueness of Honors program experience while still respecting the individuality of each discipline and the individuality of each instructor.

References

Schraw, G. (1998). Promoting general metacognitive awareness. *Instructional Science*, 26, 113 – 125. Retrieved from <http://wiki.biologyscholars.org/@api/deki/files/87/=schraw1998-meta.pdf>