

Innovative interdisciplinary business courses offered in partnership with social institutions: an update

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Abstract

An important element of the California State University Channel Islands (CI) mission is to promote cross-disciplinary thinking in its graduates. This is accomplished in part by requiring each student to complete three upper division interdisciplinary general education (UDIGE) courses. The CI faculty worked across disciplines to create and offer many UDIGE courses, including a pair of courses focusing on two social institutions, art museums and zoos (Costache and Muraoka, 2004; Muraoka, 2009). These courses were developed and are offered in partnership with the institutions. Many class sessions are held off campus and students undertake culminating projects involving the institutions. This paper provides an update of these courses and information about new courses developed using this model that now include courses focusing on libraries, national parks, colleges and universities, and music museums. Finally, the paper presents lessons learned from offering these courses and challenges in sustaining these courses.

Keywords: business curriculum, mission-based curriculum, interdisciplinary courses, social institutions, community partnerships

Interdisciplinary Courses at California State University Channel Islands

California State University Channel Islands (CI) is the newest and twenty-third campus in the California State University (CSU) system. CI, located in Camarillo, California, was founded in 2002 and currently enrolls about 6,400 students. From its inception, CI has been highly mission focused. Its mission statement:

Placing students at the center of the educational experience, California State University Channel Islands provides undergraduate and graduate education that *facilitates learning within and across disciplines through integrative approaches*, emphasizes experiential and service learning, and graduates students with multicultural and international perspectives. (Emphasis added)

“Learning across disciplines” is infused into all CI majors by requiring all students to complete three upper-division interdisciplinary general education (UDIGE) courses. At CI, an interdisciplinary course addresses problems and issues using the methodology of more than one discipline. Students must take two interdisciplinary courses connecting their majors to another discipline and a third interdisciplinary course completely outside their majors (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2010). The Martin V. Smith School of Business and Economics (Smith School) offers many courses linking business and economics to other disciplines:

- Biotechnology in the Twenty-First Century (cross-listed with Biology)
- The Business of Art (cross-listed with Art)
- Business and the Performing Arts (cross-listed with Performing Arts)
- Business and Economics in American Literature (cross-listed with English)
- Drug Discovery and Development (cross-listed with Chemistry)

CI’s Interdisciplinary Courses Offered in Partnership with Social Institutions

From CI’s inception, its faculty was encouraged to extend and enhance educational opportunities by working with organizations within its service region. This has resulted in an extensive service learning program (another element of the CI mission), disciplinary advisory boards (including a Smith School advisory board), adjunct faculty, guest speakers, and curricular opportunities. Among the curricular opportunities is a set of UDIGE courses developed and offered in partnership with regional social institutions and public agencies (Correia *et al.*, 2010). These courses have several common elements:

- They focus on familiar, non-profit, cultural and social institutions and public agencies that are mission-based with education as a major element of their missions.
- Many class sessions are held off campus at the partner institutions, allowing students to learn directly from practitioners about their areas of responsibility.
- They were developed with faculty participation from multiple academic areas; an example: faculty from business, economics, education and music collaborated to develop the music museum course), and are team-taught by faculty from the different disciplines.

- They culminate with a group project requiring students to integrate and apply what they have learned during the class.

The Smith School has offered six courses based on this model:

- **The Museum** (first offered in 2003)
- **The Zoo** (first offered in 2004)
- **The Library** (first offered in 2007)
- **The National Park** (first offered in 2010)
- **The University** (first offered in 2010)
- **The Music Museum** (first offered in 2011)

The following summary information about these courses is derived directly from CI curriculum approval forms (cross-listing programs, catalogue descriptions and student learning outcomes) and course syllabi (community partners and culminating projects).

The Museum (2003)

Cross-Listing Programs: Art, Business and Education

Catalogue Description: This course is an interdisciplinary, in-depth study of a museum from the perspective of art, business, and education. Analyzes how artistic values, business and management issues and educational projects are linked within museum practices. Each term this course is offered it will focus on a specific museum in the area. (Costache and Muraoka, 2004, pp. 68-69; Muraoka, 2009, p. 39)

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe, understand and analyze the connections between the art, business and education within museum practices.
- Evaluate the ways that art, business and education can be mutually beneficial in a museum environment.
- Examine from three different perspectives the role of the museum in contemporary culture.
- Reflect in written and oral form on the various aspects of the museum as a cultural institution.
- Describe and analyze the processes of collecting and displaying art in museums.
- Analyze critically the development of an art collection and the specificity of museum practices.
- Evaluate and analyze the business practices of running a museum.
- Analyze ethical issues in running a museum.
- Analyze the educational services offered by the museum and reflect on possibilities for new projects.
- Analyze how the educational projects of the museum are connected to what children learn in schools (California framework).

- Apply the knowledge and information to real life situation in a final presentation. (Costache and Muraoka, 2004, p. 69; Muraoka, 2009, p.39)

Community Partner(s): Getty Museum, Getty Villa, LA County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art

Culminating Project(s): A catalog for a special exhibition, planning and execution of “College Night at the Getty”

The Zoo (2004)

Cross-Listing Programs: Biology, Business, Economics and Education

Catalogue Description: An interdisciplinary study of zoos and zoological gardens from scientific, managerial, business, recreational and educational perspectives. Analyzes how these perspectives are linked within zoo practices. The course will include an in-depth case study of a local zoo. (Costache and Muraoka, 2004, p. 69; Muraoka, 2009, p. 40)

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the roles of biology, business, economics and education within the zoo.
- Analyze the interactions of biology, business, economics and education in a zoo. This analysis will include the ways that these disciplines complement and conflict with one another.
- Reflect in written and oral form on the zoo as a social institution and the role of the zoo in contemporary society.
- Describe the processes of collecting and displaying flora and fauna in zoos.
- Analyze the development of a zoo collection.
- Describe the effects of the macro-economy on a zoo.
- Describe microeconomic issues facing zoos.
- Evaluate the business and management practices of zoos including marketing and public relations.
- Analyze ethical issues in managing a zoo.
- Analyze current trends in zoos.
- Analyze the educational services offered by zoos and reflect on possibilities for new projects.
- Analyze how the educational projects of zoos are connected to what children learn in schools (California framework).
- Synthesize knowledge and information by developing a proposal for a new zoo exhibition. (Costache and Muraoka, 2004, p. 70; Muraoka, 2009, p.40)

Community Partner(s): Santa Barbara Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium

Culminating Project(s): A plan for a new zoo exhibit, a children’s book conveying the mission of zoos

The Library (2007)

Cross-Listing Programs: Business, Economics, Library and Education

Catalogue Description: A study of university, school (K-12), public, and special libraries from business, economic, library science, and educational perspectives. Analyzes how these perspectives are linked within library practices. The course will include study of local libraries. The course will include field trips to local libraries. (Muraoka, 2009, p. 41)

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Reflect in written and oral forms on the history, mission, and roles of libraries.
- Describe the roles of business, economics and education within libraries.
- Analyze the interactions of business, economics and education in libraries. This analysis will include the ways that these disciplines complement and conflict with one another.
- Describe the functions and basic organizational structures of libraries.
- Evaluate critically library collections and services.
- Compare and contrast the roles of public, school, academic, and special libraries.
- Analyze ethical issues in managing libraries.
- Synthesize knowledge and information by developing and presenting a proposal for a new library program, service, or collection. (Muraoka, 2009, p. 41)

Community Partner(s): Camarillo Public Library, Los Angeles Public Library, Reagan Presidential Library, USC Library, Amgen Library

Culminating Project(s): A proposal for a special collection for the CI library



Entrance to the Los Angeles Zoo

The National Park (2010)

Cross-Listing Programs: Political Science and ESRM

Catalogue Description: An interdisciplinary study of one or more units of the National Park Service from multiple perspectives including Political Science, Public Administration, and ESRM. The course analyzes how conservation issues and practices, administrative and policy processes and interpretive (educational) programs work within the context of a national public resources agency.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Describe and analyze the struggle to balance competing social, political and economic interests impacted by the operation of parks, particularly in the context of mission of the Park Service.
- Describe the role of research within the park and the use of scientific data by decision makers.
- Describe and analyze the policymaking and administrative processes that impact the management of a national park.
- Analyze the effectiveness of programs designed to attract and educate diverse park visitors.
- Analyze how park educational programs are connected to what children learn in schools.
- Describe issues facing parks in the 21st century.

- Write persuasively about conservation, public policy and education issues.

Community Partner(s): Channel Islands National Park and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Culminating Project(s): A campaign to encourage college student visits to national parks

The University (2010)

Cross-Listing Programs: Business, Economics and Education

Catalogue Description: A study of institutions of higher education from multiple perspectives including, but not limited to education (teaching and learning), scholarly and creative activities, community service, management, and public policy. The course will include case studies of colleges and universities in the region and may include field trips to these institutions. (Muraoka, 2009, p. 41)

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Reflect in written and oral forms on colleges and universities as social institutions and on the roles of colleges and universities in contemporary society.
- Compare and contrast the missions and responsibilities of the three segments of California public higher education as denoted in the California Master Plan for Higher Education.
- Describe the basic organizational structures of colleges and universities.
- Describe the processes of developing and delivering the curriculum.
- Describe political, economic and budgetary issues facing colleges and universities.
- Evaluate the business and management practices of colleges and universities.
- Analyze current trends in colleges and universities.
- Synthesize knowledge and information by preparing and presenting a group paper/project on a current challenge facing higher education. (Muraoka, 2009, p. 41)

Community Partner(s): CI

Culminating Project(s): A new major proposal using actual curriculum approval forms

The Music Museum (2011)

Cross-Listing Programs: Business, Economics, Education and Performing Arts/Music

Catalogue Description: An interdisciplinary study of music museums from the perspectives of music history, appreciation and production, business, economics and education. Analyzes how these disciplines are linked within music museum practices. Includes a study of a local music museum. (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2012)

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Describe the roles of music, business, economics and education within the music museum.
- Analyze the interactions of music, business, economics and education in the music museum.
- Reflect in written and oral form on music museums as social institutions and the role of the museum in contemporary society.
- Analyze the development of the museum collection.
- Describe economic issues facing the museum.
- Evaluate the business and management practices of the music museum.
- Analyze current trends in music museums.
- Analyze music museum educational services and reflect on possibilities for new projects.
- Synthesize knowledge and information by developing a proposal for a music museum project. (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2012)

Community Partner(s): The GRAMMY Museum at LA LIVE

Culminating Project(s): A plan for a new music museum exhibit, an audio tour of an exhibit for the visually impaired



The GRAMMY Museum at LA LIVE, Los Angeles, California

Benefits, Concerns and Costs

Our experience with these courses has revealed benefits, concerns and costs for students, faculty, the university, and the partner institutions:

Benefits for Students

Developing Cross-Disciplinary Thinking and Perspectives.

“Why do we need to learn about art history?” a business major asked of the business faculty in the first offering of *The Museum* in 2003. Professor’s response: “In understanding the workings of an art museum, it is important to understand and appreciate the art found in the museum and artists that created it.” Often, students do not understand why we ask them to learn about disciplines outside their majors. Since “Learning across disciplines” is a CI Mission Pillar, these courses are a primary vehicle by which students fulfill this Mission Pillar. It is gratifying to see students develop cross-disciplinary thinking and perspectives as they work through these courses. For example, the culminating projects for these courses require skills from many disciplines for successful completion. Many business majors have been thankful to have an art major as part of their project team when the project requires graphic design or an English major to perfect written proposals.

Developing Communication Skills.

All CI UDIGE courses are writing intensive (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2010, p. 117). This characteristic is made operational in these courses through multiple writing assignments including essays on mission statements and the partner institution’s programs. For example, for *The Music Museum*, students prepare essays on exhibits and an exhibit opening at the GRAMMY Museum. For *The Zoo*, students compare and contrast like exhibits at the Los Angeles Zoo and Santa Barbara Zoo. For *The University*, students prepare proposals for a new course and a new major at the university. In addition, the students develop presentational skills as they present their culminating projects. For example, for *The Music Museum* and *The Zoo*, students present exhibit proposals to the museum and zoo staffs. For *The University*, students presented proposals for a new major to the university president.

Developing Teamwork.

As noted earlier, these courses require culminating projects in which teams of students demonstrate how they have integrated what they have learned throughout the course. Examples of the term projects are listed with each of the courses above. The students typically select their own teams and manage the workload with minimal faculty supervision. The lessons learned in completing the term project will prove valuable in their future endeavors.

Careers in Areas of Passion.

These courses stress the value of finding career areas in which the students feel passion. As partner institution staff members interact with the class, the faculty ask them to describe their

career paths and why they chose their careers. In every instance, the staff member's passion for the institution and its mission is clearly evident. Students learn that it is possible to have a career in an area of passion (for example, art, music or national parks) that involves the business disciplines.

Benefits for Faculty

Developing Interdisciplinary Scholarship.

Since these courses are team-taught by professors from different disciplines, they require high levels of interaction - both in and outside of class - among faculty members. This extensive interaction can lead to interdisciplinary scholarship among these faculty members. (Cordeiro and Muraoka, 2010, p. 117)

Benefits for the University

Developing Signature Courses.

Students enjoy these courses. Many report that they have been looking forward to enrolling in the courses for several years (students must attain junior status prior to enrolling). Often, the courses are fully enrolled on the first or second day of availability. In addition, these courses have received extensive favorable publicity. Given their popularity and positive publicity, the courses are developing into signature courses for the institution.

Assessment of Student Learning.

Students learn a great deal in these courses and are able to demonstrate their learning in term papers and culminating projects. These assignments are an excellent resource for the assessment of student learning outcomes as they are embedded in each course, and all students are required to complete UDIGE courses as a university graduation requirement. The Smith School distributes rubrics to assist the faculty in assessment of business major student learning outcomes that address critical thinking, written and oral communication, and teamwork.

Benefits for Partner Institutions

Identifying Potential Employees.

As students attend these courses, they receive a 360-degree look at the institutions and their operations giving them a better understanding of employment opportunities than they would have otherwise. Similarly, the courses provides the institutions with potential applicants who are especially well informed about the institutions. For example, The GRAMMY Museum typically hires new staff through its intern program. Students from *The Music Museum* are well prepared

to enter the intern program based on their familiarity with the museum and its mission, operations and staff.

Staff Development.

All staff members participating in these courses report enjoying the experience. They indicate that their participation resulted in reflection on their work and careers that is highly beneficial. Many staff members do not normally make oral presentations (Muraoka, 2009, p.43.). Therefore, participation in the course assists them in developing these skills. Partner institution management has acknowledged the value of the staff participation in these courses. For example, the CEO of the Santa Barbara Zoo commented that he found staff development to be a particularly attractive by-product of *The Zoo*.

Contributing to the Educational Mission.

Partner institutions for these courses are mission-based, and, in all instances, education is an element of their missions. These courses contribute directly to their educational missions by connecting students and other members of the university community with the museum and its programs. In many instances, the institutions have a strong interest in attracting the demographic represented by the typical college students (specifically, adults in their early twenties).

Benefits for Faculty, University and Institutions

Opportunities for Collaboration.

A significant benefit of these courses is the opportunity for collaboration. The university-institution partnerships have resulted in several campus-located events and activities. These included presentations to the university's donor circle by institution administrators, luncheon presentations for business students and the community, and the installation of a museum exhibit in the university library.

Conversely, the university-institution partnerships have resulted in partner institution-located events and activities. For example, university faculty have assisted three partner institutions with strategic planning and students and faculty from *The Museum* have assisted with the organization of College Night at the Getty. Recently, a formal partnership between CI and GRAMMY Museum was established as CI was named a "Museum Affiliate." This formal arrangement provides specific benefits for both the university and museum. Lastly, through its relationship established with Channel Islands National Park in *The National Park*, CI has established the California State University Channel Islands Santa Rosa Island Research Station. The research station can house up to 25 student and faculty researchers on Santa Rosa Island. For more information on the research station, visit www.csuci.edu/sri.

Favorable Publicity.

Unusual courses like these are often of interest to local and even national press and can provide favorable publicity for the university and its partners. These courses received radio (National Public Radio) coverage and newspaper (Ventura County Star, Los Angeles Times and

Chronicle of Higher Education) coverage (Alvarez, 2004; Hernandez, 2010; Millman, 2007; Moore, 2010; Orozco, 2011). Additionally, both the university and partner institutions have featured stories about these courses in quarterly magazines sent to alumni, members and donors (Muraoka, 2012).

Concerns for Students

The Quality of Presentations.

Since many of the presentations are made by partner institution staff members, the quality is uneven. While not all staff are experienced presenters, their passion and knowledge are consistently excellent (Muraoka, 2009, p. 44).

A Dearth of Course Materials.

Due to the unique nature of these courses, there are few available published course materials, especially textbooks. When possible, course handouts, PowerPoint presentations, articles, videos are made available via the campus learning management system. Student attendance is especially important for these courses as they rely heavily on experiences gained at the site of the partner institutions (Muraoka, 2009, p.44).



Bunkhouse at CI Santa Rosa Island Research Station

Costs for Students, Faculty, University and Partner Institutions

Costs.

While the benefits of these courses accrue to students, faculty and the partner institutions, these stakeholder groups also incur costs related to the unusual nature of these courses.

For students and faculty, there are financial costs and other effects of the class meetings being held off campus. First, there are direct transportation costs. CI does not provide transportation for students to the partner institutions. Therefore, students must pay for transportation and parking (when applicable) to off campus class sessions. Second, as a result of the distance to the partner institutions, students cannot take courses and the faculty cannot teach courses immediately before or after these courses. Finally, some students reported that their travel time adversely affected their employment opportunities. (Muraoka, 2009, p. 44).

Additionally for faculty, there are the costs inherent in team teaching. Effective team teaching requires a high degree of interaction and collaboration. While the interaction of the faculty throughout the course provides benefits to the faculty as noted above, it also imposes additional costs and challenges not present in traditional courses. (Cordero and Muraoka, 2010, p. 118) In these UDIGE courses, faculty members (usually two faculty) participate fully in course planning, attend all class sessions, and jointly grade all assignments. The faculty members do not “split” the class with only one attending each session. “Splitting” would severely curtail the interdisciplinary experience for students.

In recognition of the benefits and challenges associated with team teaching, usually both faculty members receive full work-load credit. As a result, these courses are expensive to staff. Often, the costs associated with assigning more than one faculty member to a course can be mitigated by increasing class size, but due to space limitations at partner institutions, the enrollment in these courses is usually limited to 30 students.

For the partner institutions, these courses can be a burden on the staff. It is important to recognize this burden and take steps to minimize it. For example, staff members can be offered varied ways to participate: individual presentations, panel discussions, and interviews.

Next Steps—Sustaining the Courses in the Long Run

While there is interest in preparing new courses using this model (for example, *The Symphony Orchestra* or *The Hospital*), a more pressing concern is sustaining the existing courses. To sustain these courses, it will be necessary to secure faculty, university and partner institution support. Support from these stakeholder groups is not independent. Below are our recommendations about garnering future support:

A first key element to sustaining these courses is to develop faculty who will be able to teach the courses. These courses draw on faculty from many disciplines as they are multidisciplinary. To maintain ongoing faculty interest in these courses, it will be necessary to reward faculty participation in the retention, tenure and promotion process. The first courses built on this model were offered over a decade ago, and for all courses but one, *The National Park*, there have been changes in the line-up of faculty teaching the courses. This is a positive outcome with regard to sustaining the courses over an extended period of time at CI.

A second key element to sustaining the courses is closely related to the first. Specifically, it is essential to establish and maintain university support for the courses. This is found primarily in the form of support from the university for faculty teaching the courses. As noted above, we recommend that faculty be given full teaching load credit for teaching the courses.

The third and final key element is to maintain and if possible strengthen support among partner institutions. Here are several tactics to this end:

- Maintain high levels of flexibility in working with partner institutions.
- Identify and work through a key contact in partner institutions.
- Minimize burden on partner organization.

In the long run, the courses will be sustained if there is a win-win-win-win situation for all stakeholders: students, faculty, and the university and partner institutions.

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