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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary Studies in General Education (IDS) is Valencia Community College's alternative to the fragmented approach to general education reflected in many schools' unrelated requirements of survey courses and laboratories. A two-year course of study, IDS brings together literature, mathematics, social science, natural science, philosophy, rhetoric, religion, art, architecture, and music within a historical framework. The program concentrates on the major developments in Western intellectual history and their modern implications, with the purpose of creating an enlightened and liberated citizenry. This is accomplished by focusing on the thinking, integrating, and communicating skills and processes by which knowledge is acquired. The success of the IDS program has been contributed to by a unified philosophy of general education, instructors' knowledge of classroom techniques, and a team of dedicated, experienced generalists. This success has been attested to by the transfer, business, and general interest students who have completed the program. (This program description lists 18 specific cognitive competencies at the heart of the IDS program and is appended by a listing of the works covered in the IDS's ten subject areas.) (AYC)

I.D.S. [Interdisciplinary Studies in General Education]: A Program for the 80's.

Valencia Community College
Orlando, FL

I.D.S., A PROGRAM FOR THE 80's

What is I.D.S.?

I.D.S is short for "Interdisciplinary Studies in General Education." It is an alternate approach to general education initiated six years ago by Valencia Community College, Orlando, Florida. It is a two-year course (6 semester-hours per semester for 4 semesters, 24 hours) which brings together English, mathematics, social science, natural science and the humanities.

I.D.S. integrates these disciplines with a historical framework. The course concentrates on the major developments in Western intellectual history and their modern implications. Fo. example, a central theme of an early unit is "Greece and the Birth of Reflective Thinking." Within this context students examine the ideas of the early scientists (Heraclitus, Thales, Democritus and Parmenides); the ideas of Plato and Aristotle; the ideas of Pythagoras and the birth of geometry; the ideas of classical sculpture and achitecture (Polykleitos, Myron, Phidias, the Parthenon); and the creation of Greek literature (Empedocles, poetry and Sophocles, drama). Students develop an awareness of the nature of reflective thinking - as well as see the foundations of many modern disciplines. After this classical foundation is established, the unit moves to the modern implications of these ideas. Students then examine: "Reports, Inferences and Judgements" by S. I. Hayakawa, "A Theory of Personal Causation - Richard de Charms," the poetry of Robert Frost, "Giant in the Nursery" by Jean Piaget and "The Delphic Oracle as Therapist" by Rollo May. These modern parallels reinforce the significance of the material studied. (A list of additional material covered is attached.)

Why do we need an alternate approach to general education?

During the 60's and 70's the term "general education" became synonymous with "required courses." Many colleges conceive general education as the number of courses students must plow through before they can get to the important stuff - their specialities. Therefore many courses in general education have become introductions to specific disciplines, designed for students who will become specialists. These introductions often focus exclusively on disseminating information. Other courses have become laboratories for the development of mechanical skills practiced in isolation. The study of both disciplines and skills have suffered, but students subjected to this kind of general education have suffered most. They emerge with the idea that learning is a random mosaic of fragmented information and skills. Everyone has the pieces, but no one knows how to put the puzzle together. While "...nearly everyone (educators) agrees that students should not merely master discrete bits of knowledge but integrate them as well... some faculty members are content to leave the full responsibility to students."*

* "Avoiding Potholes: Strategies for Reforming General Education" by Jerry G. Gaff, Educational Record, Fall 1980, p. 54.

I.D.S. seeks to re-integrate the curriculum and to return to the original purpose of gereral education -- to create an enlightened and liberated citizenry. We believe that:

1. General education should change a person so that he is able to make effective decisions that change the course of his life for the better.

2. General education should help a person achieve knowledge of himself through learning about knowledge of the world represented in the disciplines.

3. General education should help a person develop qualities that make him employable throughout his life.

In order to do this, general education must make a student aware of the processes by which knowledge is acquired and it must assist the student in mastering these processes.

> "When this is conscientiously done, even if it be at the expense of 'coverage' of subject matter, students develop an entirely new intellectual stance, characterized by heightened respect for their own intellect and by pride of achievement. In consequence they begin to be conscious of the speciousness of the rewards they received in circumstances in which they were driven to memorize without understanding, and they are motivated to attack still more demanding inquiry without giving up readily on encountering difficulty or temporary frustration. In other words, to quote Justice Learned Hand s ironic phrases, they become more 'willing to engage in the intolerable labor of thought - that most distasteful of all our activities.'" *

What are the benefits to I.D.S. students?

The I.D.S. faculty has identified a series of competencies which they feel are the heart of general education. These involve competence in knowledge and thinking, communicating, and integrating. More specifically they are:

1. The ability to locate key ideas, thesis statements and/or topic sentences.

2. The ability to paraphrase key ideas or key passages (without distorting the idea and taking into account the context of the idea).

3. The ability to comprehend a literal meaning and then move to a symbolic or implied meaning.

* "Some Thoughts on Reasoning Capacities Implicity Expected of College Students" by A. B. Arons in Cognitive Process Instruction ed. by Lockhead and Clements; Philadelphia: Franklin Institute Press, 1979. p. 214.

4. The ability to separate evidence from inference and to identify the kinds of evidence provided.

5. The ability to recognize underlying assumptions.

6. The ability to recognize the different types of reasoning: inductive, deductive, intuitive.

7. The ability to view an idea and its exposition as a whole. To see the relationship of key idea and its medium of expression.

8. The ability to grasp the symbolic nature of language (verbal or representational).

9. The ability to translate from one form of expression into another.

10. The ability to understand and use ratio reasoning.

11. The ability to understand the relationships and principles within a formula and draw inferences from it without performing a numerical calculation.

12. The ability to recognize and control variables in an experimental setting.

13. The ability to evaluate the clarity of others' work as well as one's own. The ability to judge when sufficient information is presented and when information is presented clearly.

14. The ability to formulate one's own line of reasoning by drawing inferences from data and evidence.

15. The ability to visualize hypothetical outcomes of specific systems and/or being able to carry a line of hypothetical reasoning to its conclusion.

16. The ability to check personal reasoning for internal consistency; to check it by alternate paths of reasoning, and to examine limitations of this kind of thinking by constructing extreme examples.

17. The ability to express one's own ideas in a variety of modes (i.e. essay, poem, speech).

18. The ability to choose and affirm ideas which are found personally satisfying.

These competencies define the learning process itself and transcend the boundaries of separate disciplines.

What makes the I.D.S. approach work?

Three things: a unified philosophy of general education, a knowledge of classroom techniques and a team of dedicated experienced generalists.

This approach has been pilot tested in 2 separate 2-year programs. Our students have given it their overwhelming approval. Transfer students testify that this program equipped them for four-year colleges and universities. Business students felt it gave them an edge over others because of the confidence and skills they developed. General interest students (housewives, retirees) applauded their increased awareness of the world.

"Why is I.D.S. a program for the 80's?"

The demands of our economy and the demand that educators must be accountable for the education of their students are forcing us to re-examine the quality of our educational institutions. I.D.S. can serve as one, SUCCESSFUL model for returning quality to general education.

A SAMPLE OF THE WORKS STUDIED IN I.D.S.

NATURAL SCIENCE

Galileo - Dialogue Concerning Two Chief World Systems
Aristotle - Doctrine of Four Causes
Isaac Newton - General Scholium - Postscript
Max Jammer - Concepts of Absolute Space
Albert Einstein - Concepts of Space
Copernicus - The Revolutions
Kepler - From Uncertainty to Certainty
Charles Darwin - The Origin of the Species
Frederick Kummel - Time as Succession and the Problem of Duration
Albert Einstein - On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Machiavelli - The Prince
Carl Jung - Man and His Symbols
Rousseau A Discourse on Equality
Thomas Malthus - An Essay on the Principles of Population
Richard de Charms - A Theory of Personal Causation
Karl Marks - Communist Manifesto
John Dewey - Democracy
Jean Piaget - Giant in the Nursery
Sigmund Freud - Psychoanalysis and Man's Sense of his own Importance
Rollo May - The Delphic Oracle
Eric Fromm - The Emergence of the Individual and the Ambiguity of Freedom
Adam Smith - The Wealth of Nations
B. F. Skinner - Walden II

LITERATURE

Carlos Castaneda - An Appointment with Knowledge
Montaigne - Apology of Raymond Sebond
Voltaire - Candide
Goethe - Faust
Charles Dickens - Hard Times
Wordsworth - Tintern Abbey and Ode to Immortality
Sophocles - Oedipus Rex
T. S. Eliot - The Wasteland
Dostoevsky - The Grand Inquisitor
Samuel Beckett - Waiting for Godot

PHILOSOPHY

Plato - Allegory of the Cave
Martin Heidegger - Being and Time
Rene Descartes - Discourse on Method
Alexander Pope - Essay on Man
Jean Paul Sartre - Existentialism
Francis Bacon - Rationalism
John Locke - Rationalism
Henri Bergson - Reality; Dynamic/Static
Immanuel Kant - The Categorical Imperative
Friedrich Nietzsche - The Will to Power and Beyond Good and Evil
J. S. Mill - Utilitarianism

RHETORIC

Plato - Phaedrus
S. I. Hayakawa - The Process of Abstracting
Monroe Beardsley - Style and Good Style

RELIGION

Book of Job
Blaise Pascal - Discovery of Finitude
Joseph Campbell - Religion is Mythology
Paul Tillich - Religion as Wish Fullfillment
Søren Kierkegaard - Fear and Trembling
Martin Luther - Table Talk and The Freedom of a Christian

MATHEMATICS

Aristotle - Logic
Rene Descartes - Points on a Line/Points on a Plane
Morris Kline - The Meaning of Math
Ratios
Direct and Inverse Variation
First and Second Degree Equations
Geomtry: Plane and Solid

ART

Greek Classical Sculpture
Roman Art (fresco and portraits)
Michelangelo
Bernini
Rembrandt
Delacroix
Turner
Renoir
Cezanne
Picasso
Pollock

ARCHITECTURE

Parthenon
Pantheon
Chartres Cathedral
St. Peter's Basilica
Palace of Versailles
Eiffel Tower
Frank Lloyd Wright
Le Corbusier
Paolo Soleri

MUSIC

J. S. Bach
Mozart
Wagner
Stravinsky
Schoenberg
Cage