



OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS
Linked-Course Format Study Executive Summary
January 27, 2012

Effectiveness of Linked-Course Format

In response to faculty request, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) prepared an open-ended survey distributed by the faculty to students enrolled in the linked-courses on campus during the 2011 fall semester. The students being surveyed were asked a series of question based on their experience of taking the linked-courses “Writing China” and “Sucker Pond: Environment, Physics, Ethics, Writing.” A total of thirteen students (ten from the “Writing China” course and three from the “Sucker Pond” linked-course) responded to the survey, which consisted of six different questions directed at their experience and opinion regarding the format of the course. To maintain confidentiality, each completed survey booklet was submitted in an individual envelope with an affixed “confidential” label over the seal of the envelope. The instructor collected the sealed envelopes and returned them to IE, the student returned them to IE, or responses were emailed to the Director of Assessment. The questions on the survey were as follows:

- How would you describe the linked-course to someone who was considering enrolling in the spring semester? Would you recommend linked-courses to them?
- What were some things of value that you learned from these linked-courses?
- Do you feel that the linked-courses together created an integrated learning experience?
- What are some ways that the linked-courses could be improved?
- Do you think that you learned more from the linked-courses than a non-linked course?
- What are your thoughts about the project associated with the Linked-Courses?

Overall Evaluation

In general, the survey demonstrated that students enjoyed the linked-courses. The majority of the students said that would recommend the class to others.

“I would describe the linked courses as very enjoyable and an exciting way to learn. I would suggest taking a linked course to anyone who asked.” (Writing China student)

Students said that the linked course created an integrated learning experience.

“Yes. The Chinese language learning mixed with the English Expo writing with the China Country stuff we learned was good.” (Writing China student)

“Absolutely! With the linked course I got both sides of China. I got the culture and life as well as learned the dialogue and characters.” (Writing China student)

Students also pointed out that it was through their writing that they learned more about the linked courses.

“I believe the whole course was of value. Not only do I now understand the Chinese language. I am well-educated in their customs, beliefs, and culture. To add to this my writing skills have been

greatly improved and I am more interested in all cultures, not just that of China!” (Writing China student)

In reference to how linked courses impacted learning, a student said,

“... the combination between writing for science and its connection to the world through study.” (Sucker Pond student)

Students also enjoyed the field trips associated with the class.

“I really enjoyed the field trips we went on because they were interesting and a great learning experience that I really enjoyed being a part in.” (Writing China student)

“I enjoyed the field trips very much and also opened me up to information that I may have never come across if I was not part of this class.” (Sucker Pond student)

Another common theme was that students enjoyed the smaller class size. The students also enjoyed having the same students in both classes. One participant felt that this contributed to learning more in the linked course stating:

“... because they were small classes with the same kids in both which made it easier. It’s a great experience while learning.” (Writing China student)

When students were asked if they felt they learned more in the linked-course majority answered “yes.”

“Absolutely. Learning about the same topic in two classes not only doubled my knowledge but kept the information fresh in my mind. My other classes were less interesting and easier to forget things we learned.” (Writing China student)

Although many students said that the research paper (final project) was challenging, the majority of students found it interesting.

“It is a little challenging and a lot of work, but it is exciting to pick a topic we are interested in and to improve our writing skills.” (Writing China student)

Other students described their experience on the research project as a good way to “wrap up” the semester and “broaden my knowledge.”

“I think having an overhanging project over both courses is a wonderful idea and strengthens the bond between both learning environments.” (Sucker Pond student)

“Writing China”

For the “Writing China” linked course, many students associated positive adjectives with the course. When asked to describe the course, words such as “enjoyable,” “fun,” and “exciting” emerged. Students labeled the layout of the course as the two classes going “hand in hand” and that they “built off each other.” In addition, many students said that they learned a lot about Chinese culture. Another arising theme indicated that through their writing, they learned about China including Chinese culture, tradition, socio-economics, beliefs, language, history, and customs. Students wrote:

“What I learned in Chinese class was useful in my writing class and vice-versa. They worked well together and reviewed information in ways that helped me learn. Knowing more about Chinese culture helped me with certain papers and ideas in my writing class.”

“I believe the whole course was of value. Not only do I now understand Chinese language. I am well-educated in their customs, beliefs, and culture. To add to this my writing skills have been greatly improved and I am more interested in all cultures, not just that of China!”

All of the respondents said that they felt like the course created an integrated learning experience. One student said that it was their “favorite class” and that they gained an immense amount of knowledge.

“Yes! These were both my favorite classes, I learned an immense amount of information I didn’t know, and I had fun while doing it!”

“Yes, I was able to transfer my knowledge back and forth between the classes. I am unable to that with the other classes I’m currently enrolled in.”

Another theme present in the survey was the positive response to the small class rooms as well as the fact that it was the same group of students in both classes.

“... it was really helpful to have two classes with the same group of people. We all seem more into the class and the work.”

Another student felt that her learning experience was better as a result of the small class size and familiarity of classmates.

“Yes, because they were small classes with the same kids in both which made it easier. It’s a great experience while learning.”

Out of the ten students surveyed, nine students said they would recommend the course to others.

“Sucker Pond: Environment, Physics, Ethics, Writing”

One “Sucker Pond” student described the class as, “two classes that work together on a common project.” Of the three students surveyed, two said that there was a heavier work load than other classes.

“The linked-course seems like a lot of extra work in the beginning, but as the semester goes on, you begin to get attached to the project.”

All three of the students said that they would recommend the course. Students said that through writing they learned more about science and how it affects the world. Students also learned the value of “community” and “team work.”

“we learned about the value and importance of the conservation of wetlands and how we might be able to raise awareness on conservation.”

All students felt like the class did create an integrated learning experience; however there was an emerging theme that at times, it was not as cohesive.

"I do feel that the linked courses created an integrated learning experience. The writing about science class really helped when it came to writing reports about the science was involved. We used what we learned in the writing about science classes to complete assignments. On the other hand, we did not spend a lot of time actually learning about the physics of the pond. We spent a lot more time on water quality and hydro geological measurements."

"It did create an integrated learning experience, but it would have been even better if the classes were linked based on the big project being studied. For instance, the writing about science could have been linked to a Biology class or a Chemistry since the project we did was mainly issues pertaining to Biology or Chemistry."

"Yes. Combined, the courses strengthened the methods and goals of the other course. Not at all times, but there were instances where one course was beneficial in terms of studies in the other course."

Participant Recommendations

Several students made recommendations regarding the linked-course program. One theme in the survey was that there needs to be more advertising for the courses, and that no one seems to know about the courses.

"I believe the linked-courses could be better advertised. Not many people know much about linked-courses and really how much is offered. I thought it was a great experience with the field trips many people would like to be a part of if they knew." (Writing China student)

"The linked-courses could be improved by telling more students about it. I know my friends have never even heard of it, so spreading the information of linked courses could be improved." (Writing China student)

Another theme was that more linked courses should be offered.

"I think there should just be more linked courses to pick from and not just have people placed into them unless they really like both courses being linked." (Writing China student)

"Different topics and more choices! Other than that I think it's a wonderful program." (Writing China student)

One student suggested having the classes scheduled one after another or (at least) in the same day. Another recommendation was to do add course content to avoid repetition.

"Maybe have some differences in course coverage. Some of the topics we covered in Chinese we also covered in Writing. That is a good thing, but towards the end began to get repetitive." (Writing China student)

Other students suggested that there be more stress on time management.

"Time proportioning is a major factor especially with the classes that had field trips. Most of the actual lab times were taken up by the field trips and we missed out on lab work." (Sucker Pond student)

"...Also, the schedule needs to be thoroughly worked out beforehand, because trying to pack enough information between two courses without coordination can be a hassle." (Sucker Pond student)

"I think that if the linked courses are to be offered in the future, professors need to make sure the actual work of completing the project is done in both classes. For our project of Sucker Pond, most of the work we did on the pond was done during the Physics class, which took a lot of time away from learning the course material." (Sucker Pond student)

Recommendations from the Office Of Institutional Effectiveness:

Overall, students seemed to really enjoy the classes, field trips, combination of the material covered in the classes, small classes, and having the same group of people in the classes. However some students in "Writing China" felt the material became repetitive over both classes. Although the surveys show positive reaction to the small class size, the IE recognizes that full enrollment could be a priority. Based on the comments the office recommends more marketing for the classes. As some student have stated above, that little is known about this course format.

It is important to note that it was difficult to assess the "Sucker Pond" linked class because only three respondents (out of five enrolled) completed the survey. Taking this into consideration, the IE recommends that the class try to evenly spread the project over both classes, so one course does not have to sacrifice material covered due to the project. The format can be considered successful if the content is related to the subject of the course and if the content covered in the course does not frequently overlap in both courses.

For "Writing China," the IE recommends that more be added to the course content – since several students expressed that the material was repetitive at times.

Since students seemed to enjoy the class, felt that it created an integrated learning experience and felt they learned *more* in the linked-course than other courses, IE recommends focusing on marketing efforts to boost student enrollment in the course. If this is successful, then IE would recommend offering more courses covering other subjects – as is being done during the spring 2012 semester.