

Sarwar Jahangir | sjahangir@kbcc.cuny.edu

Petra Symister | (Not available)

Kingsborough Community College of The City University of New York
Brooklyn, New York, USA

Career-Focused Learning Communities for Second Semester Community College Students

Teaching courses in isolation does not demand that students integrate concepts across disciplines. We will present in our session how to overcome the above challenge. Our objectives are to provide information on the development and outcome of linking career related courses for learning communities. We will inform the audience of our 1) steps in selecting and designing the linkage, 2) teaching approaches with integrative thematic seminars, and 3) development and administration of assessment tools. We will invite audience participation to critique our findings and focus on the scope for improvement. This will answer and guide the audience in creating their own career-focused learning communities.

Success with first semester learning communities in our college in terms of increased retention, improved critical thinking and an enhanced ability to connect ideas across courses, inspired us to develop programs for second semester learning communities. First semester learning communities coupled one content-based course with one writing course. This time we designed an integration of two content-based courses along with review- and career-based seminars emphasizing the application of the content courses. This 1) oriented the students towards connecting ideas through the linked disciplines, 2) stimulated critical thinking, and 3) enhanced deeper understanding of the application of the courses to careers.

To this objective, our college created several career-linked learning communities, including biology and psychology, business and psychology, and business and mathematics, each followed by appropriate seminars on relevant topics and themes. We designed linkages between biology and psychology by identifying points of overlap for students with prospective careers in mental health and child education. These provided us with themes for integration including ethics, psychophysiology, neuroevolution, development and genetics. Additionally, weekly career-based seminars supported these themes.

We taught these courses during twelve-week semesters presenting topics concurrently. Thematic concepts were reinforced through problem-based learning and student presentations. In the seminars, students learned that their careers demand an understanding of the integration of biology and psychology. This echoed through the opinions expressed by speakers drawn from several career fields.

To assess the effectiveness of this linkage, we applied multifaceted assessment techniques throughout the semesters. We developed a questionnaire to measure the level of integration and administered it at the start and end of the semester.

This demonstrated that linked courses to support integrative learning can be effective, and this can be measured. This holistic approach to acquiring knowledge will prepare students better for their lives after college.