

**Assessing the General Education Requirement
of an Interdisciplinary Approach to a Topic
Pilot Study**

submitted by

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Three credits of Chaminade's General Education Requirements for all Baccalaureate Degrees are an Interdisciplinary Course. Consistent with the need for assessing student learning outcomes at the program level, the student learning outcomes for the General Education Requirements also need to be assessed. As there is, at this time, no agreed upon approach for assessing the overall student learning outcomes for the General Education Requirements, it is necessary to perform this assessment of student learning outcomes within the specific course, in this case, the interdisciplinary course. The *Chaminade University Catalog 2008-2009*, on page 72, states that the student for the Interdisciplinary Course Requirement will

1. Demonstrate the ability to approach particular areas of human culture and experience utilizing a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
2. Demonstrate the ability to transcend disciplinary boundaries in articulating approaches to the ultimate questions of meaning in human experience.

In order to assess these student learning outcomes, a series of multiple choice questions were developed and assessed for the final exams in the interdisciplinary courses of Psy 463 **Psychology of Death and Dying** and Psy 477 **Daoist Psychology**.

Psy 463 Psychology of Death and Dying

The final exam for **Psy 463 Psychology of Death and Dying** consisted of 50 multiple choice items for a total of 200 points. The mean score was 141.73 with a standard deviation of 24.67. The reliability for the exam was **.79**. 37 students took the exam.

Question #7 integrates religion and science within the context of health relative to addressing the stress associated with awareness of one's individual death.

7. According to Herbert Benson, the research suggests the incorporation of religious faith into the relaxation response
 - A. does not have much affect on overall health.
 - B. contributes to overall better health.
 - C. does not contribute to overall better health.
 - D. compromises the practice of the relaxation response.

81% of the students provided the correct answer of B. 100% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 80% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly.

Question #17 directly assesses the students' understanding of the meaning of an interdisciplinary approach within the context of death.

17. An interdisciplinary approach examines a topic, say death, from
- A. the perspective of different disciplines such as psychology, religion, and science.
 - B. the perspective of many sub-disciplines (developmental, personality, social) within a specific discipline (psychology).
 - C. within the discipline itself.
 - D. only the perspective of the topic itself, in this case, death.

83.78% of the students provided the correct answer of A. 100% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 70% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly.

Question # 19 assesses the student's ability to discriminate between a religious approach, a subjective opinion, a philosophical approach and a scientific approach within the context of death.

19. A scientific approach would examine death from
- A. a faith based perspective.
 - B. a subjective perspective that focused on thinking, feeling and behaving.
 - C. an analytical, rational and logical perspective.
 - D. an objective, observational and statistical perspective.

78.38% of the students provided the correct answer of D. 70% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 80% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly. The major distracter was C where 7 students (19%) selected this item. The clear difference between the philosophical approach, answer C, and the scientific approach, answer D, is that science is based on observation and uses statistical analysis to establish its claim of objectivity. In other words, from the scientific perspective, if you cannot operationalize and measure/quantify the variable it does not have any objective validity.

Psy 477 Daoist Psychology

The final exam for **Psy 477 Daoist Psychology** consisted of 50 multiple choice items for a total of 200 points. The mean score was 150.62 with a standard deviation of 21.07. The reliability for the exam was **.78**. 29 students took the exam.

Question #34 assesses the ability of the student to integrate disciplines of science, psychology, philosophy and religion within a cross-cultural context.

34. From the perspective of evolutionary theory/psychology, Daoist teachings provide solutions for
- a) successfully adapting to the environment.
 - b) spiritual development.
 - c) creating meaning in life.
 - d) establishing scientific validity.

100% of the students provided the correct answer of A. 100% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 100% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly.

Question #36 directly assesses the students' understanding of the meaning of an interdisciplinary approach within the context of the cultural perspective of Daoism.

36. An interdisciplinary approach examines a topic, say Daoism, from
- a) within the discipline itself.
 - b) the perspective of many sub-disciplines (developmental, personality, social) within a specific discipline (psychology).
 - c) the perspective of different disciplines such as psychology, religion, and science.
 - d) only the perspective of the topic itself, in this case, death.

93.10% of the students provided the correct answer of C. 87.5% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 87.5% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly.

Question #50 assesses the students' ability to integrate the disciplines of martial arts, science, psychology, philosophy and religion within the context of Marianist Educational Values.

50. The practice of the Sun style of Taijiquan and Sun style Taiji qigong outside of the classroom to start the class along with the lecture in the classroom best exemplifies the Marianist Educational Value of
- a) Educated for Service, Justice and Peace.
 - b) Provide an Excellent Education.
 - c) Educate for Formation in Faith.
 - d) Educate in Family Spirit.

68.97% of the students provided the correct answer of B. 87.50% of the upper 27% of the students answered this question correctly. 37.50% of the lower 27% of the students answered this question correctly. The Marianist Educational Value of *Provide an Excellent Education* clearly represents an interdisciplinary and integrative approach to learning.

Provide an Excellent Education

In the Marianist approach to education, "excellence" includes the whole person, not just the technician or rhetorician. Marianist universities educate whole persons, developing their physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social qualities. Faculty and students

attend to fundamental moral attitudes, develop their personal talents and acquire skills that will help them learn all their lives. The Marianist approach to education links theory and practice, liberal and professional education. Our age has been deeply shaped by science and technology. Most recently, information and educational technologies have changed the way faculty and students research and teach. At Marianist universities two goals are pursued simultaneously: an appropriate use of information technology for learning, and the enhancement of interaction between students and teachers.

Conclusion

The data and analysis of the data for assessing the General Education Requirement of an interdisciplinary course clearly indicated that students have indeed demonstrated an understanding of

1. Approaching particular areas of human culture and experience utilizing a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
2. Transcending disciplinary boundaries in articulating approaches to the ultimate questions of meaning in human experience.

The overall percentage of students answering the items/questions correctly is satisfactory given a normal distribution of performance.

Recommendations

1. As an agreed upon approach to assessing the General Education Requirements in an integrative and cumulative manner relative to specific majors has not been established, the initial focus of assessment of the General Education Requirements should be on the specific course.
2. The student learning outcomes for each of the General Education Requirements as specified in the Chaminade University Catalog 2008-2009 must be utilized.
3. A written report is submitted to Brother Bernie/Assessment Team.
4. In this written report, an explanation/description of the type of instrument/assessment tool utilized: essay, multiple choice exam, true/false exam, etc.
5. In this written report, aggregate data is required: total number of students assessed, reliability of the instrument/assessment tool utilized for measurement, the mean total score, and the standard deviation of the instrument.
6. In this written report, each item/question that is used to assess the specific General Education Requirement is presented and analyzed. This analysis must include percentage of total students answering the item/question correctly, upper percentage (usually 25 or 27%) answering the item/question correctly, lower percentage (usually 25 or 27%) answering the item/question correctly, and if warranted, further analysis to explain student performance on the item/question.
7. In this written report, a conclusion is provided.
8. This pilot study be used as an example to assure standardization of the reports.