

What do Students Learn in a Massively Interdisciplinary Course about **hOPE**?

Andrea M. Karkowski, Sharon Stout-Shaffer, Michaele Barsnack, Dina Lentsner, Deborah Shields, Janette McDonald, Amy Oehlschlaeger, Renda Ross, Andrea Thomas

Capital University

Faculty representing seven disciplines (Psychology, Art Therapy, Business, Music, Nursing, Religion, Social Work) offered a course about hope. Students explored hope through activities that included musical analysis, artistic expression, interviewing, reading, and writing. A key finding was that many students reported that they became more comfortable with ambiguity due to grappling with an abstract concept from many different perspectives.

Course Goals (structure adapted from Fink, 2003):

Knowledge	Learning Objectives	Course Activities
Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe definitions of hope Create personal definition of hope Appreciate the complexity of hope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read professional literature Discuss professional literature Written assignments
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply "hope" to self Apply "hope" to discipline Apply "hope" to potential career 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion Written assignments Artistic works
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine hope's cross-disciplinarity Explore hope in other classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read professional literature Interview professionals
Human Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspire hope in oneself, others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create playlist of hopeful music Develop, implement action plan
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize, appreciate own gifts Recognize, appreciate others' gifts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion Written assignments Artistic work (Hope Mandala)
Lifelong Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct interdisciplinary research on abstract concept of hope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview professionals (IRB approved) Analyze, synthesize, interpret interview data Relate data to literature literature Integrate interpretation into project

Sample

- Fall 2010:** 16 students participated in the course
14 students consented for us to use their journals & end-of-semester course evaluation as data
- Spring 2011:** 9 students participated in the course
9 students consented for us to use their journals & end-of-semester course evaluation as data

Faculty obtained permission from the university's IRB to collect and use students' data for research purposes.

Examples of Students' Significant Projects

- Artistic work with commentary (i.e., painting, poem, music, children's book, dance)
- Video montage of interview excerpts and music interwoven with quotes from the literature
- Short stories about hope written by and for women receiving treatment for substance abuse

End-of-Semester Course Assessment

- A mixed method evaluation: Students responded to qualitative and quantitative course questions.
- Students rated on a six-point scale how well the course achieved the 12 course goals.
- Students responded to 6 qualitative questions about their learning and strengths/ limitations of class; faculty analyzed these together at the end of each semester.
- Faculty discussed their own learning at the end of each semester.

Quantitative Results

- No significant differences (all p -values $\geq .076$) between the sections for how well the course met the learning goals with the exception of *I explored hope in relation to other classes*; data aggregated across semesters for all other course goals.
- Course goals ratings significantly above neutral point (t-value range: 6.955 - 25.957; all p -values = .000).
- Ratings for *I explored hope in relation to other classes* also significantly above neutral point for both semesters: Fall 2010 $t(13) = 4.250, p = .001$; Spring 2011 $t(8) = 11.700, p = .000$.

Qualitative Results and Discussion

Student Learning:

- Students developed a personal awareness and awareness in others; became more conscious of hope
 - Experienced empowerment
 - Increased awareness and ever-presence of hopelessness and hope
 - Appreciated connection between hopelessness and hope and non-duality of hope and hopelessness
 - Despite the abstractness of the concept, intentionally used hope personally and professionally
 - Developed a paradigm that provided structure to move beyond hopelessness
 - Drew connections between hope, faith, spirituality; become purposeful; facilitated connection with own faith
- Many students expressed a greater tolerance and appreciation for ambiguity (people, concept, own definitions, disciplines), but some students did not experience that transition
 - Came to view hope as multifaceted, complex, relational, continuous, light, movement, transition
 - Appreciated diversity from both students and professors and interdisciplinary aspect of the course
 - Got frustrated and confused but enlightened
 - Developed patience for self and others
 - Learned to appreciate the process and focus on the journey rather than the outcome
- Had to listen to others and to themselves to understand the material on affective level (not just intellectual level)
 - Course helped sustain students through difficult personal situation
 - Different parts of the class spoke to different students
 - Course helped to fulfill students' curiosity to explore abstract concepts
- Limitations
 - A few students didn't change their definition of hope
 - Too many professors/ unclear leadership
 - Not enough time to get into the discussion and class activities; wanted deeper dialog and understanding

Faculty Learning:

- Students' different levels of comfort with ambiguity can inform how we offer the class in the future, helping students be comfortable with the class and yet still develop a greater tolerance for ambiguity
- Learned to appreciate and develop a broader lens of other disciplines
- Further enhanced ability to work in interdisciplinary teams; better listening, less talking, less judgment
- Need to help students be more concrete about completing projects, developing connections with literature

Presented at the Association for Psychological Science Teaching Institute, May 2011, Washington, DC.
Poster copies available at: <http://capital2.capital.edu/faculty/akarkows/presentations.html>
Capital University Hope Project Webpage: <http://www.capital.edu/33890/>