Engaging Students in Higher Order Thinking by Engaging Faculty
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Austin College recently received a grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop “partnered courses.” While many institutions have moved to learning communities for lower level courses (joint registration in two or more courses), the motivation for such learning communities is primarily to develop a peer support system. Because the partnered courses at Austin College are at the intermediate or advanced level, the partnerships are intended to benefit both faculty and students. In Fall 2010 the first seven partnerships will begin. The purpose of the poster is to summarize (1) the training of faculty in assessment of higher order thinking skills (2) examples of the course-embedded strategies that faculty developed and (3) comments by faculty in what they hope will be the learning outcomes for encouraging students to transfer learning across courses and disciplines.

Methodologies include:
- pre- and post-test assessment using brief writing exercises,
- “minute papers” reflecting on specific classes,
- rubric-scored essays, and
- focus groups.

Kolb’s Theory of Experiential Learning
Faculty were encouraged to think about where they prefer to jump into the cycle and how the partnered courses might expand their use of new experiences.

Faculty partners elected to assess a variety of student learning outcomes:
- interdisciplinary perspective taking,
- reflective and analytical writing,
- intercultural competence, and
- problem solving

Faculty teaching in Fall 2010 report:
Collaboration with a faculty partner significantly increased their enthusiasm for teaching their own course;
Course preparation was enriched by cross-disciplinary conversation;
Students expressed greater excitement about the course when informed of the partnered component; and
When joint sessions of the two courses occurred (e.g., for an evening film or an afternoon “lab”), students seemed to “step up” intent on demonstrating their knowledge.

Students describe:
- understanding “at a deeper level,”
- making “connections,”
- developing “much broader perspective,”
- “Each [prof] playing off the other’s insights which adds greatly to the learning experience,”
- “a well-rounded idea of the context and perspective of the [novel]” and
- “greater richness” in the readings.