

Disciplinary Breadth Proposed Revisions – January 25, 2013

Guiding Assumptions for Disciplinary Breadth Courses:

1. Disciplinary Breadth courses introduce students to approaches of the discipline.
 - On the DB course proposal form, faculty will be asked: How will you make explicit to students the approaches of your discipline? Please give two or three specific examples.

2. Disciplinary Breadth courses encourage active learning and challenge students to apply the approaches of the discipline.
 - On the DB course proposal form, faculty will be asked: Through what classroom strategies, exercises, and assignments will you challenge all students to apply the approaches of your discipline? Please give two or three specific examples.

3. Interdisciplinary Disciplinary Breadth courses will enable students, after course completion, to articulate multiple disciplinary approaches learned in the course and apply them to unfamiliar issues or problems.
 - On the DB course proposal form, faculty will be asked: Please give two or three examples of how this course will enable students to articulate multiple disciplinary approaches to unfamiliar issues or problems upon course completion.

Findings

1. The current understanding of Disciplinary Breadth includes two separate goals:
 - a. Offering a broad liberal arts education that involves courses within all four divisions (reflected in guiding assumptions 1 and 2) and
 - b. Cultivating an interdisciplinary perspective, i.e., gaining experience applying the methodologies and lenses of multiple disciplines in order to understand complex problems more deeply (reflected in guiding assumption 3).
2. We believe that both of these goals are important and that both should remain a part of the Disciplinary Breadth element of the Hamline Plan.
3. The total number of DB courses should remain at 8, with 2 letters from each division. Given feedback from students and faculty about the challenges of meeting Hamline Plan requirements, we do not feel it is advisable to increase the number of required letters. The current arrangement provides a broad introduction to the perspectives from all four divisions. We do not think more letters are necessary to accomplish this goal.
4. Currently, the interdisciplinary aspect of DB is expected in all courses that receive a DB letter. This is not being done, and we feel that it is unreasonable to expect it. In many cases, faculty members are focusing on the important job of introducing students to the methodologies of their discipline and have neither the time nor the training to substantively address interdisciplinarity.
5. Therefore, we recommend relieving faculty of the obligation to incorporate interdisciplinarity into all DB courses. The interdisciplinary focus should be limited to a subset of DB courses that engage in deep reflection on the intersection of different disciplines. Training in interdisciplinary pedagogy would be made available for faculty teaching these courses.

Recommendations

1. Eight DB courses will be required, two from each division. Most DB courses would continue to carry a single letter (H, F, S, N).
2. Two of the eight required courses must carry an additional “interdisciplinary” designation (see guiding assumption 3). These must occur in two different divisions.
3. Training in interdisciplinary courses should be made available to faculty (most likely through the Center for Teaching and Learning). Faculty development opportunities should be made available for innovative course development, new directions in pedagogy, etc.
4. Innovative models for interdisciplinary courses are encouraged. These include team teaching and paired coordinated courses (two courses on a shared topic taught in two different divisions that meet at the same time and periodically join together to share perspectives; this model would encourage greater collaboration among faculty and carry no extra cost). Some courses might offer two different letters, which would also satisfy the interdisciplinary requirement.
5. Eliminate the “H” in English 1110 courses. By essentially granting an automatic “H” to every incoming first year student (the only DB letter so granted in a required first year course), the university (unintentionally) discourages the kind of exploration in the Humanities that occurs in other divisions through the disciplinary breadth requirement.

Note

Our previous suggestion was that the Interdisciplinary courses should occur at the 3000-level or higher. We believe that there is value in a “developmental arc” model (a notion that has been encouraged by the dean’s office), and that students would benefit from first getting experience in a range of disciplines and later engaging in deeper interdisciplinary work. However, there was a significant amount of resistance to this idea (much of it occurring in the feedback from the earlier Hamline Plan sessions and on responses to the survey administered by UCC). While it might be the case that many interdisciplinary courses occur at the upper levels, we are suggesting that this be left up to individual departments and faculty.