Three Models for Curriculum Integration

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Curricular integration remains a desire and challenge for many faculty and deans. Additionally, accreditation standards call for integration in a curriculum course of study, and increasingly, accrediting agencies call for evidence of demonstrable integration of the curriculum on the part of students. For example, the Association of Theological Schools identifies the following in its standards:

- ES 1.2. states, "Instruction in these various areas of theological study should be so conducted as to demonstrate their interdependence...."
- ES 6.2.2 states, "The design for assessing student learning outcomes should attend carefully to the alignment of individual course learning outcomes and degree program goals."
- The M.Div. degree program standard A.1.3.2 states, "These specific learning outcomes should shape and inform the design of all courses, supervised ministry experiences, formation activities, and other instructional strategies to establish a coherent and integrated curriculum for the degree program."

Further, the ATS Handbook of Accreditation, Section 8, reiterates, "...the standard indicates that achievement and formation in these four areas should be integrated: Instruction in these areas shall be conducted so as to indicate their interdependence with each other and with other areas of the curriculum, and their significance for the exercise of pastoral leadership.

(A.3.1.1.3)" The Handbook summarizes, "The specific intent of the standard is to avoid construing religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership as separate silos of M.Div. learning. ... Integrated outcomes result from an integrated curriculum and instructional strategies."

Aside from good intentions and accrediting requirements, striving to realize integration for the benefit of students is, simply, just darn good educational practice. Integration is a both product and evidence of "deep learning." It is the starting point of insight and the capacity to construct new knowledge by the learner. Below are three models for integrating learning in the curriculum. The models provide broad frameworks for designing points of integration and its assessment.

1. ACADEMY & CHURCH
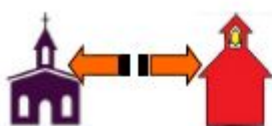
Academy and Church Integration: This integrative emphasis helps students integrate "academic knowledge" with congregational (or other) ministry context application. Aligns best with specific discipline area knowledge base and contextual learning experiences. This model seeks to bridge "theory to practice."

2. COGNATE DISCIPLINES

Cognate Disciplines Integration: This integrative emphasis helps students integrate "academic knowledge" among and between the theological cognate disciplines (biblical, historical-doctrinal, practical theology). Best for "deep learning," synthesis, interdisciplinary concepts attainment, perspective taking, evaluation, and application of principles related to the academic areas of study. In effect, this model requires students to take what they learned in one course, or, academic discipline, and apply it to knowledge or skill learned in another.

3. COMPETENCY-KNOWLEDGE-SELF

Competency-Knowledge-Self Integration: This integrative emphasis helps students integrate "academic knowledge," self-understanding, and competencies. This model is best for reinforcing knowledge base comprehension, reinforcing experiential learning, and fostering self-understanding related to academic knowledge and personal competencies. This model is closest in addressing the "formation" aspects of the curriculum and learning experience. The major domains are self-understanding, agency, and competence.

Using the models can allow Faculty to embed integrative components into the curriculum. For example, to better realize the intent of application and integration of cognate area disciplines (biblical studies, theological-doctrinal studies, practical theology studies), deans can lead faculty members to take the following steps toward integration of teaching and learning:
SELECT KNOWLEDGE BASE *(aligning practica with curriculum content):*

1. Consult the course descriptions and learning outcomes in your area's syllabi to identify the "core" knowledge of your cognate discipline area ("big ideas," foundational concepts, principles, philosophical tenants of your field). 2. Identify the scope for a cluster of the knowledge base represented in the learning outcomes you want to integrate. Not everything needs to be integrated, and not everything you want to integrate needs to happen to the same

extent. For example, "What are the five most important concepts worth knowing and integrating?"

SELECT SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES *(aligning practica with curriculum learning outcomes) :*

1. Consult the course descriptions and learning outcomes in your area's syllabi to identify the skills and competencies of your cognate discipline area (outcomes relate to demonstration of skills, capacities, abilities, practices, etc.). 2. Identify the scope for a cluster of the skills and competencies represented in the learning outcomes you want to integrate. Not every skill needs to be integrated, and not everything you want to integrate needs to happen to the same extent. For example, "What are the five most important skills worth mastering and integrating?"

CHOOSE INTEGRATION MODEL:

1. Choose one of the three models of integration (1. Academy and Church; 2. Cognate disciplines; 3. Competency-Knowledge-Self) you desire for your learners, or, best fits your choices of the Knowledge Base and Skills and Competencies outcomes. 2. Draft a set of GOALS for integration in the practica that can inform the focus, content, and purpose of the practica offerings. The GOALS should be stated in reference to the student and should identify what the student will be able to DO as a result of the practicum experience. Examples:

"The student will be able to integrate knowledge of biblical interpretation with the interpretation of the narrative history of a local congregation."
"The student will demonstrate the ability to apply theological reflection in the discernment of a ministry call."
"The student will demonstrate ability to apply and ethical framework to stewardship practices in the congregational context, including, the development of a value-driven budget process."
"The student will apply knowledge of educational principles and practices in the development of an educational program for the church."

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