

Caroline White: My name's Caroline White.

Breana Yaklin: And I'm Breana Yaklin.

Caroline White: And welcome to the Hubcast, a cosponsored podcast by MSU's Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology and IT Services. We're here with Gabe Ording, who is the director of the Center for Integrated Studies in General Science, to talk about the common intellectual experience, or the CIE, which is a series of linked integrated studies and math courses.

Breana Yaklin: The hub work to support the development of the CIE by facilitating conversations, bringing faculty together and providing access to resources and contacts across compass. So Gabe, can you start by telling us a little bit about the CIE and how this project started and how did it evolve from your initial inspiration?

Gabe Ording: The beginnings of the CIE, the common intellectual experience, we realized that students coming in as first year freshman have a tough time transitioning from high school into college and what we wanted to produce was a closer knit experience for them to have close access to faculty and also take a collection of classes that seem to work together as apposed to taking an individual class that was a standalone experience. We thought it would be better to provide linked classes where students would see relevance in a collection of courses as it pertained to a collection of common themes across the entire first year at Michigan State.

The idea really initiated with work I was doing with the students from TRIO, a bridge program, and especially those students. They identified with frequently science and mathematics or challenging classes for them and we thought it might be beneficial to link a math class with a science class and lots of folks seem to think that that made a lot of sense. But, as the director for Integrated Studies, I thought it might be good, for general science, I thought it would be good to expand that and incorporate and include courses also from Integrated Studies and Social Science and also from the Arts and Humanities.

Breana Yaklin: So, can you tell us a little bit how this evolved from your original inspiration?

Gabe Ording: With the notion of including the other Centers for Integrative Studies, that began a larger conversation about what kinds of conversations students would want to be engaged in, identifying themes that would be broadly exciting for lots of students but also that meant we needed to identify faculty to get involved in the conversation. So again, it was identifying themes that large swaths of students and faculty could get excited about, so we arrived at the environment, health and social justice and finding more and more that when you ask students what they're excited to get out of my Integrative Studies in Biology class, I'm finding

more and more students are saying, "Oh, I want to learn about social justice issues."

So, that seems a very natural place to take Integrative Studies, to help get students get engaged in meaningful ways as it relates to their own lives.

Caroline White: So, tell us a little bit about, because you're also a faculty member teaching one of these courses, so, tell us a little bit, more details about your courses and how did you approach linking it to Math 101, what themes excited you?

Gabe Ording: Recognizing that Michigan State has embarked upon a new mathematics requirement and it's not mathematics requirement, it's not a quantitative literacy requirement. I think that general education can benefit by embedding the quantitative literacy skills that the students are going to be expected to gain from those courses in other contexts. So, it really was a matter of initially partnering with Dr. [Bronwyn Wasick 00:03:50] from mathematics, who is taking the lead on delivering the quantitative literacy course. We talked about the themes that she attempts to hit in her courses and we try to identify preexisting natural compliments or overlaps between her course and the courses that will be taught by the science faculty. That was quite easy, actually in terms of interpreting graphs and/or the analysis of data, those were natural fits for what we would hope to do with our students in our science class anyways.

So, we began sharing examples, times and places in our courses that we would do certain quantitative literacy activities and we began to structure our courses with intentionality such that when students were gaining certain skills in math class, that would be timed with when we would be utilizing those skills in the science classes.

The same thing is now happening, there's a collection of faculty also in IH and ISS, who, they likewise have been partnered and cooperating looking at their curricular and they developed their courses and partnership in the same way.

Caroline White: Thinking of some of that course work and the partnerships that are there, are there any threads between the fall semester and the spring semester that you're working to carry across?

Gabe Ording: So, again, health and the environment and social justice being the theme that cuts across the entire year. One of the challenges with this project was the faculty were asked to come to the table not with a preexisting course, but to come with a blank slate. I think that was a challenge for many of us in that we have our own personal course that we love to deliver and that which we're really passionate about and to be asked to divorce ourselves from all that and trying to write something brand new, that in itself was challenging.

So, recognizing that the environment and health and social justice were the common threads that we were trying to weave together, it's turned out that lots of faculty already have a preexisting ... a devotion or a passion about delivering

information about disease, specific diseases. So, it became possible to allow disease transmission and issues of population dynamics and how that facilitates issues of disease transmission and public policy and also social justice, those threads are common across all of our courses.

Breana Yaklin: So, now that these courses are underway, what do you think has gone well or what has not gone so well with the project?

Gabe Ording: One of the most powerful and challenging aspects of this project is that we brought together, and the hub helped to facilitate, bringing together so many different parties and stake holders from across campus. When a project kind of is building momentum and there's all sorts of really wonderful ideas that could be implemented, we thought, "Oh, we really need to include so and so." And there were other people that were brought into the project. Initially, that was exciting, but then everyone has a busy schedules and everyone also has their own personal agendas or, you know, intending to do well by our students, but that makes it challenging to coordinate all schedules and outcomes. So, again, the number of stake holders and participants in the project, that was a wonderful thing because it was great to learn from others about how you might approach the delivery of a course, or oh, I haven't thought about incorporating that idea or approaching it from this way. On the other hand, it became complicated. There were a lot of moving parts and it felt like a puzzle at times and we're trying to force everything into the puzzle and there were a few too many pieces at times.

So, the benefit was, we learned a lot from different perspectives. Teaching, again, about the environment and health and social justice, looking at it from all the different disciplinarian lenses, that was powerful. You need a lot of time and you need to be willing to recognize it as a pilot and I think it's going really well. I think the students doing these courses right now are having a better, Integrative Studies experience than the students in the other Integrative Studies courses that are being offered across campus, in that they've been crafted with intentionality, with alignment with the ULGs and assessment embedded and think about backward design in really thoughtful ways, but we know that there are aspects that we could have done better.

For example, we tried to imbed a co-curricular component. We thought, "Oh, what a wonderful idea to have co-curricular opportunities made available to our students." But the ways we embarked upon that was not following best practices or backward design. We first identified, who would partner and do co-curricular options for us. And we tried to first fit those into our courses and that wasn't a smooth fit as a result. That's certainly a place where I think we could have done better and we will do better next time. Does that make sense?

Caroline White: I was going to add to that too and I think, so, a couple of months ago now, I was at the [Tee 00:09:29] Academy with a couple of the faculty members as well and we did a little bit of reflection, kind of in the moment, and that's kind of what we acknowledged as well, is that thinking more so ... we had wished that it had kind of started in a more backwards design way, where, rather than okay, let's try to

do 10 hours of co-curriculars or so many hours of co-curriculars, what if we just ask and limit it to faculty and ask them to say if we'd like there to be co-curricular experiences. Think of what fits into that. I think that was a big learning moment for all of us as well. So given that this was the first time that we all kind of approached this work, and Bre, you can answer this as well, if we were to continue and try again, what are some of the things that we really liked or things that we would try to do differently next time?

Gabe Ording: I'm blanking. There's lots. There's so much good happening in it right now. We need to provide additional opportunity for faculty to gain access to high quality faculty development and time to plan and implement that properly. The faculty that are participating in this project right now, they did it completely voluntarily. Many of them are doing it as an extra class on top of their already busy schedules. As a result, they don't necessarily feel like this is their primary duty. As a result, they can, I think, allow themselves to do the best that they can and have that be enough. Whereas, we really want this to work really well. As a result we need to set aside resources to provide the time and energy and space for faculty to really have this be what their primary goal is. If that makes sense?

Caroline White: Yeah, that makes sense.

Gabe Ording: That's a challenge.

Caroline White: Then, I'll just add one last question to Gabe, for you, because I'm kind of curious is, how has this kind of changed your classroom approach or what has been your experience as a faculty member working with another faculty member to develop your courses together?

Gabe Ording: So, actually, what I find happening, I'm teaching an extra class myself this semester, and as I'm delivering my CIE section, I'm finding myself retroactively refitting my larger lecture class. So, again, I have only 22 students. We did not get the number of students that we had anticipated, but I'm retrofitting my large lecture section. So, now my 190 students in my large section, they're actually having some of the modified assignments they have crafted for my CIE students, because it makes so much sense to approach this from this alternative vantage point, cross disciplinary way.

Caroline White: I think one of the goals we had talked about as well is having students see those inner connections between the disciplines. Have you noticed that already with your students or what has been that bridge between math and IT. How [crosstalk 00:12:50]

Gabe Ording: Actually, and a very exciting thing I see happening, is it is nice to have small sections and I know these students really, really well and they know me and the dynamic in the classroom is quite a bit different. It's much more relaxed. To be honest, I can't accomplish half as much, because we're spending time singing Happy Birthday to students because we know them well enough and students are bringing each other gifts and it's quite nice. They have many of their classes

together as a result. They have formed a cohort and that was one of the objectives of the project was allow them to come in in small groups, gain access to a smaller learning community, develop a cohort that they'd be with for the entire academic year, close association with faculty members, so we're achieving all of those really important outcomes. I'm really thrilled about that piece of it. That's been wonderful.

Caroline White: This is a really quick last minute, but what's the future of the CIE? What are kind of the next steps looking at next year? I know.

Gabe Ording: Wow. We recognize the benefit of what we're trying to accomplish and we definitely want to see it continue on into the future. We need to find a sustainable model by which to make that happen, which allow for that to happen, again, as I said right now we've got some faculty doing this as an extra course and that's not a sustainable model by any means. We can, though, identify faculty for whom this could be their primary focus and allow this to take shape in larger lecture sections for sure. Do we want to talk at all about the enrollment challenges? Because, structurally, to be honest, that ended up being one of the biggest challenges. I was thinking about the curriculum and the delivery of the classes, but-

Caroline White: A lot of it was just kind of structural-

Gabe Ording: [inaudible 00:14:59] frustration?

Caroline White: Yeah.

Gabe Ording: Is the original intent was that we were going to be gaining access to the students who are underrepresented and underserved here at Michigan State University and that's really where our target audience was, but if you look at the data whose actually in our classes now, it doesn't turn out to be that that's who we've got in our classes. So, we've kind of missed the opportunity that we're trying to gain access to. Now, the students who are in our classes are having a wonderful experience, but they might have succeeded just as well in a traditional course the way they're being taught in every other classroom. So, I'm a bit frustrated that we haven't gained access to the group of students who was our target population. That's a frustration.

Breana Yaklin: I think you and I had talked a little bit, when we ran into each other in [Kensy 00:15:50] a while ago, to about what we could have done to maybe make that more targeted and we had talked ... something that I kind of wish we had done or taken the time to do in the process is to talk to the different colleges, talk to students and see what pairs worked together, because I think when it came down to the enrollment challenges, we were kind of looking, we were looking at what students were even eligible for the program as well based on their requirements and what they needed to graduate and that was, I think, a pain point for all of us as seeing that there wasn't a huge pool of students eligible. I think looking toward the future, or if I could do it again, I would've taken more

time to talk ... have those conversations to see what pairs of classes would work for students. See what students needed for a requirement at more detail, what some of the roadblocks would have been, because I think we are all really excited about what was designed and the possibilities of that and I think hitting that red tape and hitting those barriers was frustrating for all of us and a little bit demoralizing.

Gabe Ording: So, the original idea was a wonderful idea. But this was an instance where we built something and assumed people would come to it and get excited about it, but there weren't enough students who could fit the mold that we created. As a result, we need to go the other way, or backward design. Go to the colleges and ask them what do you want us to build for you? In which case, we can then get the academics faculty in those colleges and also the academic advisors to be fully behind what we would produce and the students would then be helped to recognize the benefit of being enrolled in these courses.

Breana Yaklin: Yeah. I think another kind of benefit on the faculty side or something that was really cool for me to observe, was seeing everyone work together to figure out what the connections between their courses were and realizing how, not easy in a way it was to connect, but how many possibilities or ways that the courses could be connected. I think seeing how everyone in that team bounced ideas off of each other and worked together. That was really inspiring and I think that's a great experience for students to have, to have courses that, where their faculty know each other and they've worked together and it feels a little bit more like a community than some other courses where you're not as connected.

Gabe Ording: We've brought together a phenomenal group of faculty, and they did great things, they're doing great things.