

1-1-1998

Interdisciplinary capstone course: The Mizzou experience

John P. Dwyer

School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri, Columbia

Ernie P. Wiggers

School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri, Columbia

Hardeep S. Bhullar

School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri, Columbia

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Recommended Citation

Dwyer, John P.; Wiggers, Ernie P.; and Bhullar, Hardeep S. (1998) "Interdisciplinary capstone course: The Mizzou experience," *Natural Resources and Environmental Issues*: Vol. 7, Article 43.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/nrei/vol7/iss1/43>

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5. Exams — Students complete two in-class exams, a mid-term and a comprehensive final. Exams are not ‘open book’, but students may bring in two pages of any ‘notes’ they’d like. In addition, in order to promote teamwork and to foster learning, students have the option of completing the exams individually or working with one other student of their choosing.

In my presentation, in addition to providing more details on the activities described above, I will:

- 1) involve the audience in developing group responses to some of the questions I have posed this semester in my problem-solving course;
- 2) describe some of the student-based, instructor-based, learning environment-based and institution-based challenges facing those who implement collaborative learning activities; and
- 3) show samples of my course syllabi, draft text, “activity journals”, and recently completed student projects (Environmental Impact Assessments, and Environmental Assessments and Decision Notices).

INTERDISCIPLINARY CAPSTONE COURSE: THE MIZZOU EXPERIENCE

John P. Dwyer¹, Ernie P. Wiggers, and Hardeep S. Bhullar

Associate Professors, Forestry Program,
Fisheries and Wildlife Program and Parks, Recreation and Tourism, respectively,
The School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri,
1-30 Agriculture Bldg., Columbia, MO 65211

During the winter semester of 1992, in response to a university-wide mandate through its General Education Program for each academic unit to have a capstone experience in their degree programs, the School of Natural Resources initiated an interdisciplinary course that would bring together students from forestry and fisheries and wildlife. After eight years, the capstone course has grown to include students from Parks, Recreation and Tourism as well.

The process of developing the interdisciplinary capstone experience has been driven by our vision to produce a learning experience in which the student can feel comfortable and confident in working as a productive member of an interdisciplinary team on a complex natural resource problem. In this developmental stage both student and instructors have benefitted from the experience. The students have identified the importance of working within interdisciplinary teams to solve natural resource conservation problems and a need to work effectively as a member of a team. At the request of students, a “team building” exercise was added to the class to help the students understand the personality types that might be represented on teams and how to best blend these “types” to help the team function smoothly. Other actions taken to improve the quality of the capstone experience included providing the students with feedback on their plan from a panel of outside reviewers and requiring the students to incorporate the panel’s feedback into their final draft.

The ultimate goal of the capstone experience is the achievement of the desired outcomes for the student. Based upon an evaluation of the capstone experience the students realize that cross-disciplinary teamwork is essential to address today’s complex natural resource problems. Likewise, they tell us that they feel more comfortable and confident in using the knowledge and skills they have gained in the classroom.

This paper will describe the course, outline our vision, and share in the actions taken in the past and projects designed for the improvement of the course in the future.

¹John P. Dwyer, corresponding author, phone 573-882-3537, email: john_dwyer@muccmail.missouri.edu