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THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE,
DIMENSIONS OF LOVE:
AN EXPERIMENT IN
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

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Dedicated to the support of interdisciplinary studies as intellectually sound and academically necessary, this paper is an expanded version of the presentation made by the authors during the 17th Annual Conference of the Association of General and Liberal Studies (October 27-29, 1977, Ogden, Utah). The subject of the conference, "General Education: Diversity by Design," seemed to the Interdisciplinary Studies team at Palomar College (including, in addition to the authors, Donna Tryon, Art, Richard Peacock, Film, and Don Piche, Philosophy) to be particularly appropriate to efforts there to establish a series of interdisciplinary courses in a thematic, team-taught design focusing on the human experience. Parts 1, 2, 3 of the paper remain substantially as presented at the conference, with some updating. However, when the presentation was made at Weber State, the course was being taught for the first time and was in its academic infancy of two months. It has now been offered for a second semester and Part 4 considers the evolution of the model as the team learns by its successes and failures. Part 1 discusses the importance of interdisciplinary studies in the community college; Part 2 treats of various course models; Part 3 describes the "Dimensions of Love" course; Part 4 presents a further stage in the evolution of the model and some tentative conclusions.
1. The Importance of Interdisciplinary Studies in the Community College

There is a need at the community college level for a broad spectrum humanities course or sequence of courses, designed primarily for the non-articulating student whose education tends to be fragmented in discrete parts of carefully separated disciplines. The majority of our community college students do not go on to four year institutions. For them, the A.A. degree is terminal education, and the community college may be one of the last opportunities they will have to explore art, literature, philosophy, and other humanistic studies. Because of the rigors of technical programs of study, students cannot find the hours to take the many available courses which would provide them with a broad liberal education. The result is that we turn out students who are often impatient with, even contemptuous of, fine arts, philosophy, literature, and related fields. They may see the bits and pieces; they do not see the patterns they form, their relationships.

Our students leave our institutions with highly specialized technical skills enabling them to perform certain timely and specific behaviors. They can manipulate many quantifiable, material elements of existence for today. Since, however, the speed of our present outdates our technology as we are teaching it, it may be that the best kind of futuristic education we can help our students to acquire is that long and speculative view we inherit from the humanities.

Available in such a view is a heuristic for tackling the hard questions about our being. Up to now, in order to make sense of experience, students' education is based primarily on two questions: What is it? How does it work? We have taught the contents of our world and that everything has structure, how to take that structure apart, to lay it out and look at it, to reassemble and to operate it. They know about form and function. What they don't know and what we need to teach them is based on other questions: "Does this relate to that?"; "Why did that happen?"; and "Does it mean something?" Our students may see the parts; they need to see the relationships which give our culture meaning and dimension. A learning approach which provides an integrated view, that of interdisciplinary studies, is considered next in several model designs.

2. Some Models for Interdisciplinary Courses

Every good graduate student understands the importance of the integrity and uniqueness of his or her discipline. Much more than academic, this departmentalization is psychologically reassuring and economically secure. It becomes a way of life. In view of this feature of academic life, and in view of the need for interdisciplinary courses which deal with real human problems, the question of how to preserve the integrity of particular disciplines in truly interdisciplinary courses must be confronted. Instead of the usual "historical vs. topics" question, then, sketched here are the features of three models or concepts which raise questions about those aspects of given disciplines to be dealt with in interdisciplinary courses. These are models for individual undergraduate courses, not curricula. The models are considered separately, but this should not be taken to mean they cannot be combined in various ways.

The first may be called the Parade of Stars Model. A course based on this model will present the results/findings/conclusions/expressions of the participating disciplines on a topic or from a specified historical period. The
material presented is not selected in order to aid the student in an in-depth study of any given discipline. Simply, the significant “upshots” are presented: the philosophers’ conclusions, the painters’ paintings, the musicians’ achievements. The instructors “parade” these before the class, noting similarities and differences that can readily be observed. Such a course is designed to develop some understanding of a topic or historical period and to stimulate further study.

Among the criticisms of the Parade of Stars Model is the view that such a course would not be truly interdisciplinary. A topic or historical period might be better understood through taking such a course, but the parade would be too much like the parade of subjects which already constitute an average disintegrated class schedule: Biology, 8:00; Philosophy, 9:00; Music, 10:00. A further criticism comes from the disciplinarian: the Parade of Stars Model seems to popularize the disciplines; it’s too predigested. No understanding of the development of the discipline nor of its special methods is taught in the course.

In defense of the Parade Model, however, one can offer the point that it is at least an ordering of materials on a given topic or period so that students can notice similarities and differences in content and approach. The material does have a focus and the participating disciplines contribute to this subject. Since the focus is not any one discipline in its purity, however, it must be granted that the study of the disciplines in their purity is not accomplished.

In an attempt to give attention to the methods of particular disciplines, some teachers prefer what may be called the Focus on Methods Model. Such a course focuses on the question of method in the disciplines participating. Empiricism in psychology, sociology, and philosophy might be the methodological focus in such a course. An understanding of the disciplines can perhaps be achieved here from the “inside” by examining the tools of the trade.

The main disadvantage of the Focus on Methods Model is that it is probably too difficult for an undergraduate student. Such a course seems to presuppose more knowledge of the disciplines than most undergraduate students can be expected to bring to the course. However, it may be feasible for upper division courses.

Is there a workable Halfway House Model? Can one overcome the problems of the Parade Model, i.e., the problems of sacrificing the integrity of particular disciplines and the problem of insufficient integration of the parts of the parade? Can one do this without making the course too difficult for undergraduates?

There is probably no way to avoid the danger of sacrificing the integrity or purity of particular disciplines. A student may take away a somewhat superficial knowledge of some concept in philosophy from an interdisciplinary course in which a philosopher participates. One simply has to arrive at a commitment to the notion that integrated understanding, at whatever depth, is more important than disintegrated knowledge in greater depth.

One solution is to refine the Parade of Stars Model by allowing plenty of time for instructors to work together preparing ways to integrate materials, to discuss terminology, and to suggest similarities and differences in the approaches of the participating disciplines. One cannot overemphasize the need for sufficient time for instructors to work together on this integration. Most of us have little training and less experience in this area; graduate school does not prepare its students to teach interdisciplinary courses. Each instructor has to ascertain the technical aspects of the discipline to be sacrificed, the insights to be and to
work with the team members to ascertain the relations among approaches to the various disciplines.

Finally, another way to look at this aspect of the problem is to consider, as the St. John’s College approach does, that the existence of disciplines is not a given but something that has to be proved, and to act, therefore, as if the pursuit of a topic by means of insights gained from carefully chosen documents or works of art is valid in itself. The method, in the latter case, is the careful examination of a particular document or work of art, as it stands, an entity in itself without much buttressing from concerns of historical data or biographical matter, in order to share in the insights afforded to the examination of a particular topic. This model, which might be a *Parade of Stars* where the works rather than the presentations or the instructors are the stars, appears to be that evolving in the course next considered, “The Human Experience: Dimensions of Love.”

3. Course Design: The Human Experience, Dimensions of Love

“Dimensions of Love” is one of three projected Interdisciplinary Studies courses (one or two will include science as well as humanities) on different topics or themes in the overall context, The Human Experience, emphasizing meanings for people living today. It is designed as an afternoon block class, meeting for three hours each week. Need was determined three years ago by survey of the faculty and the concept was then developed by a curriculum subcommittee. Last year the IDS Curriculum Development Team, composed of five instructors (four representing the various disciplines of art, film, music, and philosophy, and one acting as coordinator and supplying a language and culture context), met weekly to organize content in three-hour modules or segments. The course has been offered for both Fall and Spring semesters for 1977-78 with good enrollment both times.

Two three-hour sessions in the current semester have been assigned to each of eight units: Romantic Love, Love of Nature, Conjugal Love, Love of God, Familial Love, Sensual Love, Love of Self, Love of Humanity. The overall topic or theme, Dimensions of Love, was chosen because it was felt that love is seldom treated in a scholarly way, and that as a strong motivating force in human life and one that is many-faceted, complex, important, and elusive, it is a subject worthy of consideration. A conceptual model (Figure 1) was developed after the dimensions above had been selected as particularly interesting to explore so that team members always know what is meant by the terms of a particular dimension and can therefore work independently while still remaining in touch with each other.

In thinking about love, it seems that each dimension relates in some way to the self and that certain relationships can be seen as closer or further from the self and as primary or secondary relationships. A functional non-moralistic direction may also be perceived; Love of Self turns inward, Love of Humanity outward, and Familial Love is reciprocal. The pattern of study (and hopefully of growth) followed during the course of the semester is circular, beginning with the less demanding dimensions of love having to do with other beings or entities known but unrelated to the self, dimensions such as Romantic Love, or Love of Nature. Study next progresses to dimensions related to the self, like Conjugal Love and Love of God, and then to those which are part of the self, Familial Love, Sensual Love, and Love of Self. A final dimension of growth is related to the last, most difficult and concluding unit, Love of Humanity, which embraces all other beings, not only those unrelated to the self but those who are
unknown as well. To guide the student through the various modules or dimensions, a text, *The Human Experience: Dimensions of Love* (Palomar College, 1977, 1978) has been developed and includes introductory essays, readings, terminology, and a review of materials for each unit.

The course focuses on several aspects of human experience often overlooked in the technical courses needed for job training, e.g., the need for aesthetic experiences which enrich the emotional side of man and the need for community sharing of common goals and life experiences rather than perpetuating the separate existences of man. To address these needs and to provide an environment for integration across disciplines, the study of the arts and philosophy proceeds to view the various dimensions of love in human existence and how philosophy and each of the arts has dealt with that subject. For example, in the unit on *Love of Humanity*, a representative selection is shown of the works of Vincent Van Gogh, Honoré Daumier, Kathé Kollwitz and Goya illustrating the feelings of the artist for humanity.

The focal point for the musical experience is Beethoven’s Ninth which expresses musically the ideals of the French Revolution through the use of Schiller’s poem, “Ode to Joy.” The film for this unit is *Walkabout* by Nicholas Roeg, a story of two children abandoned in the Australian outback who are found by a young aborigine boy and how they survive and communicate even though they can not understand one another’s language or customs. Two philosophic attempts to construct a basis for a consciousness of and the practice of the love of humanity are discussed, that of (1) Karl Marx, who focuses on ways in which capitalist institutions alienate, and of (2) Immanuel Kant, who focuses on the concept of treating humanness in others as an end in itself. During the various presentations on the Love of Humanity several contemporary questions are raised: 1) Is love of humanity an abstract ideal or can it be a practical attainment in one’s life? 2) If so, how does it manifest itself?

A second example is taken from *Love of Nature*. In art, nature is shown in three manifestations: as benevolent and gracious in Roman and Cretan wall painting; as majestic, awe-inspiring, and unsullied by Romantic landscape painters of the Barbizon and Hudson River schools; as violent and destructive by Expressionist and Romantic painters. Claude Debussy’s musical impressions of “The Clouds” and “The Sea” demonstrate his unique ability to create a mood or aural setting for these specific scenes of nature. The film, “High Sierra,” depicts the life of John Muir in his environmental work of preserving the natural beauty of Yosemite Valley. Philosophy considers nature from both western and eastern points of view. Contemporary questions raised in discussion are several: What effect does communing with nature have upon the self? What happens when you love nature? Does it love you in return? Do trees have rights?

A last example is the unit on *Conjugal Love* where several artists are discussed in relation to their real-life experiences with their wives and/or lovers and how these experiences affect their art, e.g., Rembrandt and Saskia; Marc Chagall and Bella; Salvador Dalí and Gala. Sections from the *Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart comment on marriage and unfaithfulness. Philosophy concerns itself with Bertrand Russell’s *Marriage and Morals* and questions raised by viewing Ingmar Bergman’s “Scenes from a Marriage.” Contemporary questions center around a critical evaluation of the institution of marriage, its strengths and weaknesses, divorce, the single person raising a family, those qualities which make for a successful marriage, contracts and special ceremonies related to marriage to-

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4. The Model in Progress

As indicated above, one of the major problems faced in setting up an interdisciplinary program has been the fact that neither by background nor by inclination are faculties or students prepared for the necessary adjustments in academic point of view and intellectual effort required to go from the specialist’s to the generalist’s point of view, which requires looking at documents and works of art for the statements they make or the emotions they purvey or the patterns they form in and of themselves apart from the accustomed disciplinary matrix of associated biographical, historical, and comparative data. The best response developed by the interdisciplinary studies team to the criticism of “shallowness” when the interdisciplinary course was first proposed, was that the course is not a substitute for any disciplinary offering nor does it provide mini-courses in art, music, philosophy or film. Rather, and the team has come to this by a process of hard trial and severe errors, the interdisciplinary approach, at its best and in the model presently developing, can provide an intensive, necessarily limited in scope and time, and enlightening examination of specific materials drawn from these disciplines which apply to the discussion of one aspect of a single topic.

Related to the problem of general unfamiliarity with the interdisciplinary approach is that of student expectation. Students coming into the program aren’t sure about what to expect of the team nor what the team expects from them, and indeed, team expectations have undergone some modification. A journal was required the first semester, and, as might have been expected in a student group where proficiency in writing was not made a prerequisite to enrollment, this proved to be a source of great anxiety to students. The team felt the journal, as a locus for thoughtful student reaction to what was going on in class, was too valuable to drop, but it has been made optional. Objective quizzes used first semester proved to be going in the wrong direction, disintegrating thought into discrete particles, and have been replaced by take-home essay quizzes. A project is still required, and an essay final. The initially high level of student anxiety was not present during the second semester, partly for reasons of organizational adjustments, discussed above, which also included a reapportioning of instructor time to allow for logistical difficulties in working with a team of five persons, and partly because the student grapevine operated in our favor as the course progressed.

Team members, principally disciplinary in stance but receptive to experimentation with the interdisciplinary mode, have grown from the first stages of being careful not to tread on each other’s disciplinary toes, through directly confronting the problems inherent in changing one’s approach to a tentative third stage of trading viewpoints and responsibility for materials, and a consequent insight into their academic similarities, differences, frailties and strengths. There is a group determination to work at the course until it is right, and a willingness on the part of several members of the team to begin proselytizing colleagues for a second interdisciplinary course to involve both science and humanities. The most positive incentive to keep on came from members of that pioneer group of students who encouraged the team to develop another course so that they, the students, could continue with a second semester.

Far from having solved all its problems, the team has come a certain way. Having chosen what well may be the most difficult of all interdisciplinary
routes to follow, without the supporting confines of periodic timelines or a list of great books, the process has proved difficult, challenging, rewarding, and a matter of continuing importance and enduring delight. Fortunate indeed to be given the opportunity to continue their interdisciplinary endeavor, the members of the team present this description of work in progress to colleagues in the field of interdisciplinary studies.

Figure 1
DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

A solid line indicates primary relationships.
A dotted line indicates secondary relationships.