Team Teaching Proposal

While educators have long recognized the importance and benefit of team-taught courses, York College currently has no official policy regarding when and under what situations a team-taught course may be offered. The College’s Faculty Manual currently includes no stated policy on team-taught courses, for instance. While several departments have regularly offered team-taught courses, the policies governing these opportunities would seem to be ad hoc. Furthermore, there are several distinct models for team teaching (interactive, rotational, dispersed; see below) and issues regarding administrative, faculty, and financial support for team-taught courses can vary depending on the adopted model. Given the importance of team-taught courses and the lack of a clear policy regarding their implementation, we encourage the Dean of Academic Affairs in conjunction with the Academic Council to develop a policy for team-taught courses and publish it in the Faculty Manual. Below you will find a rationale for why team-taught courses should be supported at York College together with some recommendations regarding a policy.

The Benefits of Team-Taught Courses.
In “Why Team Teaching Makes a Difference,” Rebecca Anderson and Bruce Speck (Teaching and Teacher Education, Vol. 14, No. 7, pp. 671 – 686) argue that team teaching has many benefits. “According to the literature, team teaching encourages multiple perspectives, promotes dialogue/increased participation, and improves evaluation/feedback. What is quite amazing about all these benefits is that they crop up in disparate teaching situations in which various teaching strategies are employed.” As they elaborate:

Team teaching encourages multiple perspectives: Student gain multiple perspectives because two teachers offer different viewpoints, creating a climate in which ideas can be developed and freely exchanged. Students are able to see that it was possible to disagree about fundamental issues and still respect the integrity of your opponent without being hostile. Modeling by teachers can help students learn how to engage in learning effectively.

Team teaching can promote dialogue leading to increased student participation: Increased student participation naturally follows when teachers encourage the expression of multiple perspectives by modeling learning and mutual respect.

Team teaching can improve evaluation/feedback of students’ performance: team teaching offers students the opportunity for multi-perspective feedback based on teacher collaboration.

At its best, interdisciplinary and team-teaching involves close collaborative teaching among faculty members so that students have the chance to become involved in the dynamic exchange of ideas across academic disciplines. Students learn how to think about a given subject from different disciplinary perspectives and how that subject is shaped by different approaches. They participate in a debate that is larger than the
boundaries of a single discipline and thus can become a part of a larger intellectual community. Faculty members from different disciplines can also be rejuvenated by the experience of teaching together in the same course. Through such teaching, they advance their research interests by means of close contact with colleagues from other disciplines working on related questions. They have first-hand contact with a world of ideas distinct from their own disciplinary training. They are spurred to reflect on the assumptions and ideas that constitute their own disciplines. Through the rare opportunity to teach collaboratively, they also have a chance to improve their own teaching by observing and interacting with a colleague in the classroom. Outside the classroom, they also have the opportunity to exchange ideas about how to refine their teaching. For students and faculty alike, there are few devices more effective in strengthening intellectual community than interdisciplinary teaching. (Faculty Senate, University of Virginia).

Based on her experience in team-teaching as part of the humanities program at Stanford University, Melissa C. Leavitt notes that “Team teaching boasts many pedagogical and intellectual advantages: it can help create a dynamic and interactive learning environment, provide instructors with a useful way of modeling thinking within or across disciplines, and also inspire new research ideas and intellectual partnerships among faculty.” Leavitt identifies several models of team teaching:

- an **interactive teaching model**, where all members of the teaching team are present during each course meeting. This model provides the most opportunity for the integration of different subjects and disciplines.
- a **rotational model**, in which only one instructor is present at a time, but a series of instructors rotate throughout the course, teaching only the course topics that fall within their specialty. While the rotational model allows students to learn each aspect of the course material from an expert in the field, it has the disadvantage of forcing students to adjust to a new teacher's style several times over the course of a semester.
- In a **dispersed team model**, the course meets two or three times a week, once with all faculty members present, and once or twice more in sections with one faculty member present. This model "provides opportunities for integration and interaction" when the instructors teach together, but also provides "a small class environment" in a single-instructor scenario. However, this model can limit the opportunity for students to hear multiple perspectives on the same topic, one of the core learning advantages of team teaching.

**Suggestions for a Policy**

Given the benefits of the interactive teaching model, York College should encourage faculty members to offer such team-taught courses. The model most often used at York College encourages faculty members to team-teach courses as an overload, on top of their regular teaching commitments. While some faculty no doubt prefer this model and there are benefits to offering such courses as an overload, faculty members should also have the opportunity to team teach as part of their regular course load. Given the benefits of team-taught courses, especially of the fully interactive teaching model, and given the difficulties of offering such courses in addition to their regular teaching commitment, we
recommend that York College develop a policy for permitting team-taught courses as part of a faculty member’s regular load. A possible approach, modeled after the current course release policy, would be to permit each department the opportunity to offer one team-taught course per year in which two faculty members would work collaboratively and which would count as part of the faculty member’s full teaching load. While there would be some expense associated with this approach, it must be weighed against the obvious benefits of developing a policy and creating the opportunity to offer team-taught courses.

**Bibliography**


