Your English Dept. Agreed to do What? The integration of Agronomy 356 & English 309
Your English Department Agreed to do WHAT?

Dr. Thomas Polito
Department of Agronomy
Department of Ag Education & Studies

Dr. Dave Roberts
Department of English

Iowa State University
Your English Department Agreed to do WHAT?

- Our work is part of ISU’s Learning Community initiative
- The Continuum of Communication Intensity
- Our Journey
- Barriers
Learning Communities

- *Community* builds peer support and forges bonds between students and teachers.
- *Community* makes learning more engaging and meaningful by enabling students to connect ideas from courses across the disciplines.
Degrees of communication intensity

- “Let the English Dept. do it!”
- Acknowledging responsibility
  - But what to do about it?
- Communication intensive courses
  - Essay tests
  - Communication projects
Degrees of communication intensity

- **Clustered courses**
  - Aside on Learning Communities
  - Student cohorts *without* faculty collaboration

- **Linked courses**
  - Cohorts *with* faculty collaboration
    - Related readings
    - Related assignments
Degrees of communication intensity

- Integrated courses
  - Exclusive cohort with maximum faculty collaboration
    - Coordination at the syllabus level
    - Joint assignments
    - Joint evaluation of those assignments
Syllabus coordination exercise

- Where can you develop links with this course’s syllabus?
The Journey Begins

- Early 1990s—College of Agriculture
  - Fundamental and comprehensive curriculum review
- Stakeholder feedback
  - Graduates technically competent but poor communicators
The Journey Begins

Based on the review, the Ag College established the following communication outcomes:

- Be able to speak and write clearly and persuasively.
The Journey Begins

- Be able to prepare effective visual presentations.
- Be able to work effectively with others on complex, issue-laden problems requiring holistic problem-solving approaches (and communicate the solution to an audience).
The Journey Begins

- The “new era”
  - Recognizing responsibility
  - Developing a curricular response by:
    - Implementing communication intensive courses
    - Seeking help from English and establishing AgComm
The Journey continues

- Tom’s course, Agronomy 356, carries communications intensive credit
  - Utilized AgComm consultants from Rhetoric & Professional Communication program
The Journey continues

- **Agronomy 356: Soil, Water and Fertilizer Management**
  - Enrolls juniors & seniors from various curricula in Agriculture
  - Requires students to complete weekly quizzes, each consisting of four essay questions
  - Includes collaborative writing, required revisions, and an oral presentation
The Journey continues

- Problem encountered in 356
  - Students understood the agronomic principles in isolation
  - Expectations were not met in:
    - Their problem solving abilities
    - Their abilities to effectively communicate the solutions to those problems
The Journey continues

Our Solution:

Integrate Agron 356 with English 309 through common:

- Students (exclusive cohort)
- Course objectives
- Course project
- Classroom space
The Journey continues

- **English 309: Report and Proposal Writing**
  - Enrolls juniors & seniors from every college at ISU
  - Requires 6-8 projects, about 8000-10,000 words total
  - Requires collaborative writing, revision, and oral presentations
The Journey continues

- The Integration Process
  - Building the team
  - Coordinating the syllabi
  - Handling the unexpected
  - Continuing instructor interaction
Building the Team

- We were lucky to have the AgComm network
- It takes a common vision . . .
  - Similarities of commitment among the three instructors to focus on students
  - Opportunity to blend teaching, research and assessment
Coordinating the syllabi

- Assignments are aligned with the consulting process
  - Prospective client report
  - Consulting proposal
  - Progress reports
  - Formal oral presentation
  - Final recommendation (farm plan) report
  - Oral presentation to client
Syllabus coordination exercise

- Discuss your results
  - Common ground?
  - Hook-up points?
- Here’s how we did it ...
Handling the unexpected

- Tom saves the day
- Which class is this?
Continuing instructor interaction

- **Weekly meetings**
  - Fine tune the coordination
  - Trouble shoot

- **Daily collaborations**
  - Attend and actively participate in each other’s classes
  - Cross-reference each others’ material
Continuing instructor interaction

- Joint evaluation
  - PC report
  - Progress report
  - Farm plan
Evaluation exercise

- Provide students with feedback on the handout
Examples of joint evaluation

- Samples from 356/309
Barriers?

- Getting Started
- Finding collaborators
- Course scheduling
- Others?
Barriers?

- Getting started
  - Find out what types of communications your graduates do and work some into your course
  - Focus on problem solving
    - Tom found the communications strategies that Dave teaches are also problem solving strategies.
Barriers?

- Require students to communicate solutions to an audience (client, boss)
  - Working with subject matter knowledge
  - Practicing problem-solving strategies
  - Communicating
Barriers?

- Finding collaborators
  - Not all English departments are the same
- Network
  - Where do teachers congregate
  - Colleagues of friends
Barriers?

- Course scheduling
Barriers?

- What barriers might you find?
- Brainstorm solutions