**Paradigms, Predictions and Joules Status Report**

**Dan Brabander and Rob Martello**

A summary of comments presented at the Babson-Olin-Wellesley Three College Collaboration Retreat on June 17, 2013

We decided to focus on two areas: the **techniques** that we developed in our interdisciplinary course, and the ways we have attempted to **disseminate** our successes and challenges. In each case we divided our comments into "pluses" (things that worked) and "deltas" (areas for improvement).

I. **Techniques**: Practical aspects of co-teaching a transdisciplinary course across two colleges

**Background information about the course**

* Paradigms, Predictions, and Joules was a two-college course offered in fall of 2012 to 17 Olin and Wellesley students.
* The course integrated environmental science and the history of technology around the topic of sustainability.
* More important than our disciplinary coverage and content delivery was the development of common themes, techniques, frameworks, and methods that spanned these disciplines: for example, modeling, concept mapping, the intersection of narrative and analysis, data and evidence use techniques, etc.
* We relied upon a creative funding mix to build and nurture this learning community: involving both Olin (Innovation fund) and Wellesley (ERD) sources. Of course, Mellon funding was essential!

**Pluses**

1. **Course assistant:** we hired a recent Wellesley alum to co-lead the course. She was essential! She involved herself in brainstorming/content development and also chimed in during the class to make sure key ideas were communicated (kept an eye on class dynamics, offered her feedback to us for planning next classes, helped us remain adaptable and continually improve).
2. **Practitioner fellow:** We hired a consultant to train students in the use of a state of the art country-level energy flow modeling software package (LEAP). She offered critical expertise and a real-world component to our work. This also gave us a chance to model ways that we as instructors responded to new information and techniques.
3. **Two college activities are** **more than just academic experiences… they also facilitate cultural exchange and broadened perspectives!**  Meeting on two campuses for alternate weeks involving dinner = created a tight learning community and environment required to achieve high quality project based deliverables, fostered teamwork and real collaboration, and smoothed out cultural differences by converting them into learning experiences.

**Deltas**

1. **Summer stipend** (from Olin and Wellesley) was much appreciated: this essential funding acknowledged the extra time associated with developing co-taught, transdisciplinary courses across two colleges and helped compensate our efforts. But we need more normalizing amongst institutions in terms of supporting faculty members to do this kind of work -- it is treated differently on both campuses.
2. **Credit counting and requirements**: Not equitable… Oliners received 2AHS/2SCI while Wellesley students only received credit for sustainability certificate. Big problem!
3. **Scheduling challenges:** in the end we had to meet once a week in a huge single time block 3:20-7:30 on Tuesdays, which included Wellesley’s community meeting time.

II. **Outcomes/Dissemination**

Our Mellon grant also helped us share the outcomes of our work with BOW administrators and educators interested in starting their own cross-campus experiences.

**Pluses**

1. **Ruhlman panel**: served as a platform for integrating our disciplines across campuses around project based learning… this was a very good fit for the mission of Ruhlman. Ruhlman also served as a stellar Capstone experience: it offered an excellent audience, gave our students an authentic opportunity to do a report-out, and best of all, it gave students half of a semester for digestion and reflection before their presentation.
2. **Albright Institute:** served as an incubator for creating transdisciplinary courses. This high-profile and well scaffolded activity helped us develop our course in the first place, inspired us, brought us in contact with other audiences, and spread the word.
3. **PLTC/OLIN panel** on “collaborative teaching” - Jean Huang's awesome panel targeted an interested audience more efficiently and more effectively than we could hope to do on our own. Goal = increasing the engagement to a wider audience.

**Deltas**

Big question for us was always: how can we reach beyond the already interested? We had great talks at these activities … to a self-selected group of attendees. Here are three options:

1. Should we develop a **three-college Ruhlman-like conference** that highlights collaborative teaching and research across BOW? We sense a general interest among students but also a lot of confusion and caution. Faculty also seem interested but guarded. Use narratives of our experiences, successes, and failures to frame and answer questions?
2. Maybe a **three college web space** highlighting Mellon courses (what would that template look like?) - Make it easy to drop in key elements, link it to existing websites to spread awareness.
3. Need for “**three-college curriculum committee**”? Often, barriers have been identified on a campus by campus basis (for example, scheduling conflicts, credit counting, course catalog submission dates…). A common three college body could be a clearinghouse to making the process smoother - normalized.

**III. Mutually reinforcing strengths**

Each institution has certain strengths and resources:

* Olin has flexibility and innovation
* Wellesley has platforms (Ruhlman, PLTC, Albright) to tap into that

Combine these strengths and we provide a fertile ground for innovative teaching!