

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Three Course Connections
Integrated Event Design

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Abstract

Integrated Event Design (IED) capitalizes on three distinct courses to achieve a blended course delivery: Event Management, Research and Evaluation (for undergraduate students), and Experiential Education (for graduate students). Through the use of an event management company metaphor that fully integrates the diverse curricular concepts, course content is explored in depth, purposefully connected to real life, and occurs in an intentional sequence. In this article, we detail the course outcomes, assignments, assessment strategies, and benefits and challenges of a blended course delivery.

KEYWORDS: *Blended delivery, metaphor, event management, experiential education*

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As recommended by Powell (this issue), some integrated curricula models combine masters and undergraduate level courses to allow students to pursue the same content area, but at different depths or foci (p. 9). At the University of Georgia, we sought to move away from the unified core (Powell, Johnson, James, Dunlap, this issue) in the second semester, but still wanted to use an integrated curricular strategy. Unlike the unified approach, blending courses takes two or more courses and makes connections across them, while still leaving some autonomous integrity in each course (Anderson, this issue). Blending courses also has the potential to support distinct sets of students at different skill levels. The example outlined here, focuses in on the second semester of the Recreation and Leisure Studies required curriculum. We call this particular signature learning experience Integrated Event Design.

Integrated Event Design (IED) capitalizes on three distinct courses to achieve a blended course delivery: Event Management (undergraduate majors and non-majors), Research and Evaluation (undergraduate majors only), and Experiential Education (for graduate students). Although, students bring a variety of skill sets and competencies, the overarching goal is to create an interdependent community of learners who independently and collectively explore, develop, sustain, improve, and achieve course outcomes while also providing services to the local community.

Using an event management company metaphor (cf. Pate & Johnson, this issue), course content is explored in depth, purposefully connected to real life, and is intentionally sequenced (Warren, Mitton, & Loeffler, 2008). Students enrolled in Event Management (both recreation majors and non-majors) are considered event coordinators. Enrollment for this course is usually 80-100 students. Students who are also enrolled in Research and Evaluation (recreation majors only) are seen as having additional responsibilities as evaluation consultants who utilize their developing skills in research, evaluation, and grant writing. Enrollment in this course is usually 30-50 students. Graduate students enrolled in Experiential Education who are learning pedagogy and management strategies serve as event supervisors overseeing a group of event coordinators and operate as liaisons to the community partners—local non-profit or public service agencies. Enrollment for this course is typically 8-12 students. The teaching team, usually comprised of three to four instructors, serves as the board of directors of the company to be oversight that course outcomes are being achieved, policies and procedures are being employed, and are intentionally and critically reflecting on their learning processes. The course design also includes the support of two senior mentors (students who have previously taken the course) who support the board of directors and event coordinators, plus a staff member who serves in the role of Accounts Payable to provide financial oversight and ensure adherence to institutional policies and procedures. The organizational chart visually represents these diverse roles and responsibilities. This organizational chart can be modified to meet the needs of specific programs, the number of people involved, the experience of the people involved, the instructional resources and size of the course.

The goal of the course design and use of the IED Inc. company metaphor is to create an experience that mirrors a diverse set of potential future employment opportunities and scenarios. Some examples of enacting this metaphor include: we are “hired” by local non-profits to put on major events (usually fundraising and awareness); we have job titles and job descriptions for the positions; we hold trainings each Monday, team

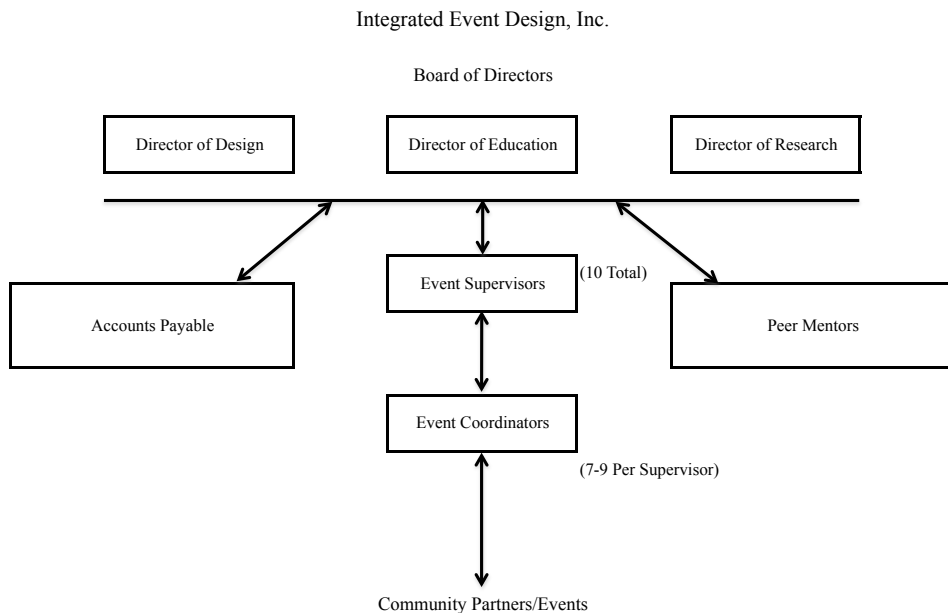


Figure 1. Organizational Chart

meetings on Wednesday and network with local professionals and conduct site visits on Friday; we follow procedures related to marketing and finance similar to other non-profit organizations; we conduct performance reviews; and we both demote and promote (and have even terminated) people within the company.

The overarching question that frames the entire experience is: What can the students do in order to better understand concepts, issues, and develop the problem solving skills necessary to be successful in their future employment and in life? With a focus on integrated learning (Anderson, this issue) and experiential education (Warren, Mitton, & Loeffler, 2008), we demonstrate a value of process over product with learning as more than a final grade. Through this focus on the process of learning, students also contribute to the local community, create a presentation on these contributions and experiences, and are afforded the opportunity to strengthen their professional portfolios through this engagement. The outward focus about what is happening in the local community and what can be offered through these courses brings the material to life with direct feedback on how we can all make a difference. This strategy highlights our recreation program's expertise and is lauded for the service-learning hours and money raised in relation to the local community. Consequently, it has been an extremely effective promotional product to our internal (dean, provost, Office of Service Learning) and external (NRPA, downtown development authority, local park and recreation agencies) audiences.

The IED Inc. Courses

Much like the Unified Core (Powell, Johnson, James, & Dunlap, this issue), we use different questions to frame the connected, but individual course experiences in

IED. What follows is the course descriptions, our overarching guiding questions, and student learning outcomes for each particular course we blend. Although we chose these particular courses to blend, others can look to create learning opportunities across other courses and resist the compartmentalization that can often take shape in the isolation of higher education.

Event Management

Course description. Using principles and theoretical models associated with leisure education, environmental education, cultural competency, and community engagement, this course provides students with the opportunity to develop advanced programming and event management skills with a special emphasis on diversity and underserved populations.

Guiding question. How can I design, plan, execute, and evaluate special events that contribute to the common good?

1. Critique/evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of special events.
2. Develop skills needed to propose, plan, execute, and evaluate special events.
3. Supervise the utility, design, and implementation of a variety of experiential activities in multiple settings that encompass reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis.
4. Gain practical experience by participating in event coordination and execution.
5. Identify risks and benefits of event options/decisions.
6. Develop teamwork skills and an appreciation of collaboration in event planning.

Research and Evaluation

Course description. In this information saturated society, you must be able to evaluate research according to its quality and relevance to your personal and professional interests. The intent of this course is to make you a more informed and critical consumer of research. Additionally, by exploring the process of evaluation, you will apply the research process to your professional interests in the field of leisure services.

Guiding question. What are the research and evaluation skills needed to make informed decisions in today's world?

1. Locate and evaluate the quality of information and research sources.
2. Discuss and apply basic terminology and concepts used in research and evaluation.
3. Describe the strengths and weakness of different research designs.
4. Apply different methods of evaluation related to leisure service delivery.
5. Locate and apply for grant funding related to leisure service delivery.

Experiential Education

Course description. Experiential Education is a graduate course for students who desire information on principles and content related to experiential education (leisure education, environmental education, cultural competency and civic engagement). Students will explore the literature, theoretical models, and an applications approach to the delivery of human services using multiple methods of conducting experiential education programs.

Guiding question. How can experiential education inform community event development, supervision, and evaluation?

1. Describe the various theoretical approaches to experiential education.
2. Articulate the philosophical, social, and historical roots of experiential education.
3. Develop a broad understanding of the nature and scope of experiential teaching, learning, and their utility to different disciplines.
4. Supervise the utility, design, and implementation of a variety of experiential learning activities in multiple settings, which encompass reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis.
5. Articulate the role and value of experiential learning in both informal and formal contexts.
6. Advocate for the relevance of an experiential education philosophy in contemporary educational and political environments.
7. Develop a disciplinary-based course or project using an experiential education approach.

Again, although we chose Event Management, Research and Evaluation, and Experiential Education as our blend, other combinations could work equally as well.

Ultimately, with the right combination and a process orientation, courses can be blended to achieve pedagogical effectiveness (Anderson, this issue)

Course Assignments: Where the Blend Begins

The Event Management class and company metaphor serve as the central/primary course for blended delivery (Powell, this issue). All of the assignments for event management are described here. While the other courses have assignments that are not related to the Integrated Event Design Inc. metaphor, the major ones serve as the primary focus. Therefore, only the blended course assignments for research and evaluation and experiential education are offered below.

Experiential Education

The IED Inc. experience serves as the major organizing feature for the Experiential Education class, where graduate students (masters and doctoral) read, understand and practice various pedagogical strategies of experiential education as they support and supervise the undergraduates implementing the major events described earlier. Two assignments in the Experiential Education course are blended into the event management course to account for approximately 75% of their grade. In relation to their role in the metaphor, the graduate students taking the course are seen as event supervisors. Students are also responsible for participation and a content synthesis exercise, which accounts for the additional 25% of their grade.

Community-based program/event supervision and reflection. We empower each event supervisor to identify a community partner and create an advocacy goal related to leisure education, environmental education, cultural competency, or social justice. Once the partnership and goals are identified, the event supervisor recruits, supervises, and evaluates a group of 7-9 event coordinators to participate in the design, implementation, and reflective evaluation of a 15-hour community program or special event. Graduate students are also encouraged to undertake a cursory

understanding of the undergraduate's course content (related to event management), in addition to their own content on experiential education theory. In addition to managing these responsibilities, the student maintains a reflective product (to be shared with the instructors) that documents the experience (facts, emotions, own learning, etc.) in relation to all of the course content. We have seen multiple strategies of reflection employed, including journaling, blogging, charades, and collages. We encourage creativity.

Event Management

We value process over product.¹ In most semesters, the exams and learning activities account for only 25% of the course grade, while the first two assignments described below account for another 25%. The final assignment, the Integrated Event Management lab accounts for half of the course grade, but it is divided into several components and the point allocation is intentionally determined so that the success (or failure) of the event does not contribute to the student's success in the course. It is through the intentional structuring of course assignments, and the grades associated with them, that student's evaluation is focused on their processes of learning, and not on the actualization of the planned event.

Event promo-critique. Students attend an event (e.g., musical performance, professional lecture, catered meal, or film) and use that event to write 1) a one-paragraph promotion of the event followed by the event details, and 2) a detailed three-to four-page critique of the event. Excellent critiques incorporate course knowledge (readings, lectures, guest speakers, etc.). This assignment is useful because it gives them practice, prepares them, and critically invites their reflection on these experiences in anticipation of the work they will be doing on their events.

History and retro-event design. Students select a major event from history (those from diverse cultures are preferred) that did not involve official "event professionals." Students then detail the event by descriptively describing its historical and cultural significance at the time the event occurred. Students then share in small groups their work with the intent to both clearly communicate findings and receive critical feedback from peers. Finally, students are told to select one paper and apply a "retroactive event design" to their selected historical event. The paper will include a detailed outline for the event—outlines can be in narrative or bulleted form but should provide significant additional details useful for present day event planners. Student walk away for a greater appreciate of the details of historical events, executed without event planners and gain experience in imagining recreating managing a major historical event with contemporary social issues.

Integrative event design lab. In small groups, the Event Management undergraduate students provide leadership in the assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation of a major special event for a minimum of 15 hours of community interaction time, under the supervision of a graduate student event supervisor.

¹Both undergraduate and graduate students struggle with this value. We value learning, while students often value a successful event.

Each event coordinator is expected to contribute equitably to completing: a) a comprehensive event management plan, b) weekly time sheet/activity logs, c) group-determined (ongoing and final) reflection experiences, d) special event execution and e) final team presentation. In addition, using a predetermined rubric, the event coordinator's performance is evaluated by the board of directors, senior mentors, accounts payable, the event supervisor, the community agency, and their fellow team of event coordinators. Each component is briefly described below.

a) The event plan is a comprehensive document that details every necessary aspect of a group's special event. At minimum, the event plan should include a description of the stakeholders, goals and objectives, planning schedule, target audience/appropriate participants, marketing and promotion, estimated budget², money handling procedures, setting/context facility management, auxiliary services (parking, security, catering, etc.), staffing and supervision strategy, equipment necessary, risk management/contingency, weather plan, and post event strategy.

b) The weekly timesheet/activity log consists of date, hours, and brief account of the activities in a detailed time inventory. Students are encouraged to keep track of everything, including drive time, shopping, fundraising, and any other activity related to the event. We encourage students to use some sort of organizing software such as excel or outlook to document these tasks. This is particularly useful in accounting for individual student contributions in-group and for reporting service hours in assessment reports.

c. An essential quality of learning and growth is the active and purposeful ongoing and final reflections. Reflection occurs in a variety of forms and processes (Warren, Mitton, & Loeffler, 2008). An essential component of our courses is that we require everyone to intentionally reflect on their learning, understanding, and use of course content during the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their special event. As part of the event planning groups (under the guidance and support of the event supervisor), students identify, create, and submit an outline of how each group member will practice active reflection throughout the course. Minimal requirements include a product of reflection (i.e., blogs, journals, essays, etc.), explicit expectations on how they are to be assessed on their reflections (i.e., rubric, outline, bulleted expectations, etc.) and a timeline on the frequency and when the reflections are due. These reflections are shared with the event supervisor, not the entire group, to allow a space for personal and confidential thinking, reflecting, and processing. Groups use creativity, choice, flexibility and collective decision-making to decide on their reflection strategy. We have found this results in relevant and meaningful reflection experiences which help students assimilate content, experience, and learning throughout the course. The only parameters we insist on is that it be assessed at least five times throughout the semester: four on-going/formative reflections and one final/summative reflection.

d) Special event execution is an important aspect of this class. Because we believe in the learning that can come from failing, we try to minimize the expectations around the "success" of the event. Instead we emphasize effort and the ability to reflect on what is learned from both our successes and mistakes. There are absolutely no grades or points associated with this portion of the assignment. This encourages students

²Each student pays a \$30 course fee that then goes toward an operating budget of \$200-300 for each small group.

and groups to be motivated by their desire to create quality events, instead of only doing something for the grade. The implementation day is usually highly anticipated and fruitful fodder for latter debriefing. We always have a teaching team member and encourage students to volunteer during the day of the event for other event groups.

e) Students are required to complete a quantitative evaluation for every event coordinator in their group, including themselves, and one qualitative (process reflection) evaluation of the entire group process and their role in it. Evaluation forms are provided at the beginning of the semester so students can see what qualities on which they will be assessed.

e.) During the final exam period, we ask the groups of students to do post-event presentations. We ask each team to simulate that they have been invited to the annual International Special Events Society's conference to represent our company and share the details of their project. They are given fifteen minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes to address questions from the audience. Through this, they are asked to address the purpose of the program, the theoretical approach and rationale situated within the course textbook and content, organizational details of the community partner, description of the coordination that led up to the program/event, description of the event itself, appropriateness of the program to the population participating, and discuss what changes or alternatives you would suggest to improve the program or event. We also evaluate them on their presentation format, which should be: professional (appropriate for audience, free from errors, etc.), delivered, well rehearsed, (dress, style) and innovative/creative. In addition to practicing public speaking and presentation skill, students get to see the learning that happened across the class experience and celebrate the work of the company.

Research and Evaluation

Two major assignments are undertaken in the Research and Evaluation course that blend the learning across this course and the Event Management class. These two assignments account for approximately 50% of the course grade. They are the community group evaluation design consultation and a grant proposal and are described below. In this course, other assignments and experiences more centrally focus on research and evaluation within the recreation and leisure studies field and not the course outcomes associated with the blended courses of Integrated Event Design. We use three exams and three research critiques to round out the course grade.

Evaluation design consultation. Students select a special event from a different integrative event design team other than their own. Then they use their specialized evaluation content knowledge to design a systematic formal evaluation system that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data (though the degree can vary) for that event. At minimum the evaluation plan includes a rationale for the evaluative approach/model, a discussion of any legal/ethical issues, data collection procedures and instruments, sampling strategies, data analysis, conditions of trustworthiness, a timeline, budget and potential implications supported by content covered through the course textbook and lectures. This assignment let's the student's create a "real-world" evaluation for an ongoing event in the company, making what they are learning real and meaningful in the moment with tangible outcomes.

Grant proposal. Administrators in leisure services and event management are increasingly encouraged to supplement their organizational budgets with external funding. This assignment asks students to locate an actual source of grant funding related to their integrated event design group's community partner agency. Students then create an application and proposal to hypothetically obtain the grant they have chosen. With grant writing becoming such a valuable skill, this practice is essential and because the students are motivated by the cause, their community partner, they typically exceed expectation for novices.

Additional Assessment Strategies

In addition to the formative assessment strategies of the course assignments described above, we also collect data on the community agencies we serve, the student service hours generated, and the amount of funds raised. Event supervisors and coordinators write an executive summary paragraph at the end of each semester that outlines their project and reports this data. One such example is below:

The Muddy Duck Dash was an obstacle/challenge race held at the Gainesville State Campus in Oakwood to benefit Friendship Elementary, a Hall County school of choice for their health and wellness program. There were three races within the Muddy Duck Dash: one main 3.5 mile race for teens and adults and two 1-mile races for younger children so that the Friendship students can be involved. The Muddy Duck Dash took 1,639 hours of work by the students involved. The race had 218 registered participants, 199 of whom ran, and raised almost \$4,200. The race was a huge success and had many inquiries to if it will be hosted again next year.

Then as the board of directors, we write an executive summary paragraph for the whole company and share that with key stakeholders including the students in the classes, the community partners, our alumni, the department head and associate dean for public service and outreach, and our service-learning office (see below). Finally, an evaluation is provided to the community agencies to evaluate this experience through working with this course. Valuable and useful information comes from this evaluation that assists in ongoing adaptations and changes to the courses.

Benefits

On top of good student learning, the external focus on our local community and what we have to offer in terms of professional service allows students to see that they have the ability to make difference! For example, in Spring 2012, the IED course experience served nine public and/or nonprofit agencies including Camp Twin Lakes, Athens Urban Ministries, Pinewood Library, The Shepard Center, Athens Breastfest, OurArrow (community space for families), UGA Campus Kitchens, UGA Office of Sustainability, and Friendship Elementary School, and generated a significant amount of press for our program, college, and university. In fact, the student and local newspapers will typically run two to three articles per semester. Sometimes the articles focus on the class model as a whole and sometime on particular events, like this one from our student newspaper:

A group of University students are raising funds for an elementary school by combining mud and rubber ducks. For their Integrative Event Design class, these students created the first ever Muddy Duck Dash. This 3.5-mile obstacle course aims to raise money for Friendship Elementary School, a health and wellness charter school in Gainesville that relies on donors for funding. The event will be held at 8 a.m. on April 28 on the Gainesville campus at Gainesville State College. It is open to all ages. The race is made up of 12 to 15 different stations and Joanna Fazio, a junior recreation and leisure studies major from Grayson, said obstacles are of easy to medium levels of difficulty. Participants will be given a rubber duck they must keep safe with them throughout the whole race. Racers can get creative in how they incorporate their duck into their clothing. Jeff Bryant, another junior recreation and leisure studies major from Blackshear, has been helping coordinate the event through controlling the social media aspect of planning. Not all obstacles are about strength and endurance in the race. He said there are also obstacles for the mind. "Participants will be asked questions, and if they don't get the answers right, they will have to backtrack some," Bryant said, to take part in the festivities, anyone can register online for \$45 until today at 11:59 p.m. or in person on the morning of the race for \$50. (Gholamhosseini, 2013, para. 1-3)

In addition to this publicity, the class also gets the frequent attention of our Office of Service Learning and the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach. Over the past five years, this blended course design has raised approximately \$60,000, contributed over 16,000 student service hours, and served over 30 local nonprofit or public service agencies. This kind of information is something we share with both the administration and our students to encourage us all to move beyond the classroom walls and see how course work can directly impacts others and makes a meaningful and lasting impact on our community

Challenges

Our benefits are also accompanied by some interesting challenges. One of the biggest challenges we face each semester has to do with the handling of money and marketing events due to institutional policies and procedures mandated by the larger institution. This is why we have an external faculty member and/or staff person who is not intimately involved in the daily administration of the course charged with serving in the role of "accounts payable" and "marketing and outreach." These individuals intimately understand university protocols and work to protect us from violating policies, procedures and/or damaging the reputation of our program or college. Students must present all monetary transactions through accounts payable, and peer mentors also assist us with approving marketing materials and communication with the press. We also remain vigilant about risk management issues, safety and insurance coverage for both our students and the community participants. For example, we run background checks on students working with sensitive populations, use participation waivers at our events, hire certified food handlers, purchase special event insurance, and know the local laws on raffles, casino nights, and other "risky" endeavors.

Other challenges we have faced deal with the coordination of schedules for groups to meet outside of class. Our students are hard pressed in groups of seven to nine

people to identify time away from class to work together to plan their events. We have addressed this issue by making class time useful time for group interactions and productivity. For example, the event management class meets on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 50 minutes. On Monday, we focus primarily on content delivery. On Wednesdays, we hold “staff meetings.” Most Fridays are then spent with guest lectures of local industry professionals or on field trips to local event spaces. The graduate students’ Experiential Education course meets on Wednesdays for three hours, with one of those hours overlapping with the Event Management course’s staff meeting, so they can also attend. Therefore, in the first hour of Experiential Education, we deal with content. The event supervisors then spend the second hour with their event coordinators in staff meeting. The third hour of Experiential Education is spent debriefing what is happening with them and their event coordinators/students in the planning, execution, reflection, and evaluation of their event. The Research and Evaluation course meets separately on Tuesday/Thursday.

Finally, given that this course occurs in the second semester of our program, the recreation and leisure studies majors are familiar with our expectations and have been a part of a learning community for half of the year. Socializing new, non-major students into the class is often challenging for both us as instructors and for the students. Walking into a room full of people that know each other extremely well can be intimidating. The recreation majors have already had time to assess each others’ strengths and weaknesses prior to coming to this class and that can be an advantage that the new students do not have. Of course, we do our best to mitigate these challenges to through good communication, expectations, socialization and equality between majors and non-majors in-group composition.

Conclusion

Using a blended model of delivery, Integrated Event Design (IED) capitalizes on three distinct courses to achieve a blended course delivery: Event Management, Research and Evaluation, and Experiential Education. Through the use of an event management company metaphor that fully integrates the diverse curricular concepts, course content is explored in depth, purposefully connected to real life, and occurs in an intentional sequence. Here we have detailed the course outcomes, assignments, assessment strategies and benefits and challenges of blended course delivery. We have also found great reward in being able to make a difference in our community through fundraising and service learning. As our campus service-learning director has said, “I am in awe by the creativity and excellent work of your students. The work you do for us in one semester is by far more than most do across their career. Thank you” (personal communication, Shannon Wilder, May 12, 2012). So, even if you do not have these particular courses, consider the model forwarded here and begin dreaming about how you can work across courses to provide students with meaningful learning experiences.

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