

Designing and Teaching an Online Interdisciplinary Research Methods Course in Criminal Justice

Carrie Li¹ & Professor Colleen Tremonte²

¹School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University; ²James Madison College, Michigan State University



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Project Background

CJ is an inherently multidisciplinary field of study.



Benefits of interdisciplinarity on student learning:

- ❖ Promote student learning by engaging their prior knowledge; developing their problem-solving skills; and enhancing the development of comprehensive perspectives (Newell, 1994; Lattuca, Voigt & Fath, 2004).

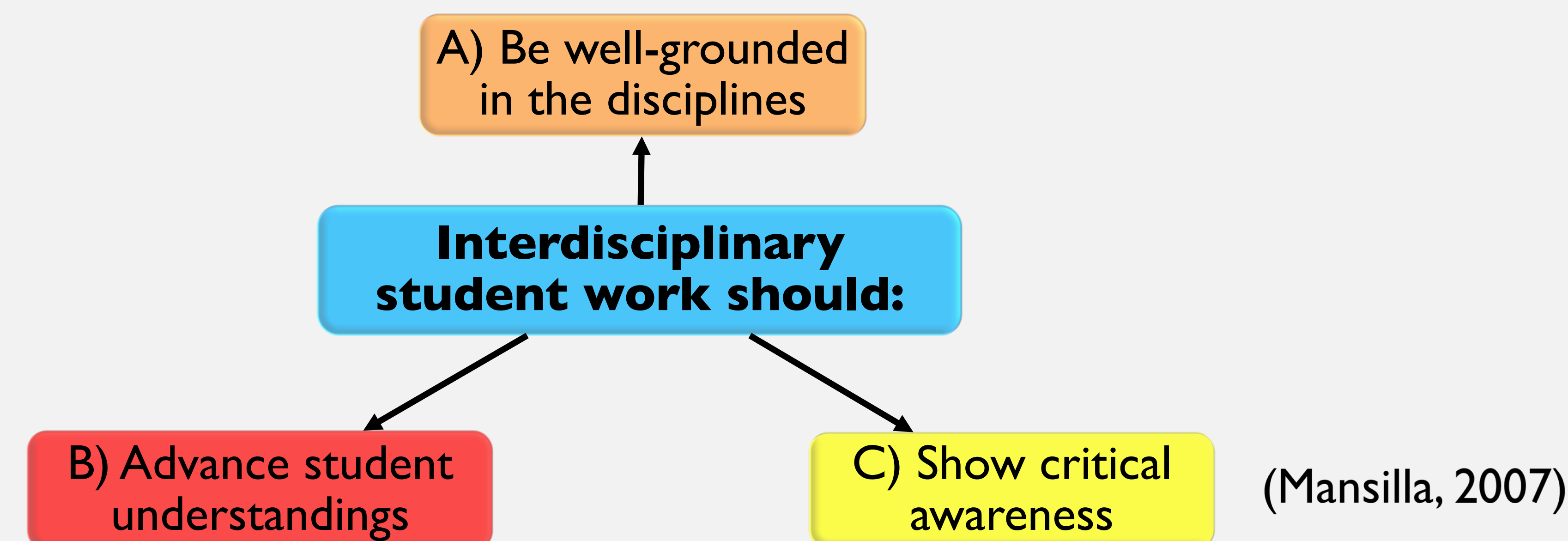
Project Objectives

- ❖ To design a course that re-focuses the application of research methods to interdisciplinary topics.
- ❖ To incorporate interdisciplinary approaches into a mandatory **Methods of Criminal Justice Research (CJ 292-730)**, and to assess the student learning engendered by such approaches.

Hypotheses

1. Students will understand the use of research methods and be able to bring in examples of the application of research methods in CJ and other disciplines.
2. Students will acknowledge the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the interdisciplinary approaches.

Methods for and analysis of student learning



Discussion Forums

Encouraging students to bring in examples and sources from other disciplines during five weekly online class discussions.

Syllabus: "There will be five weekly discussion forums throughout the semester throughout the semester to allow students to interact with each other and engage in a dynamic and collaborative learning, as well as, scholarly discussions. Discussion forums require you keep up with the readings, organize your thoughts, and communicate arguments and opinions effectively. They offer students the opportunity to facilitate learning and clear up any misunderstandings regarding course materials. You should use at least one example or source from scholarly journals, official reports, or official government statistics to support your opinions or arguments. Examples and sources from other disciplines are highly welcomed and encouraged."

Reflection Video [Works-in-progress]

Giving one lecture to expose students to the application of research methods in interdisciplinary topics (**violence against women** and **cybercrime**) and, inviting guest speakers who specialized in these topics to talk about research methods generally and specifically.

Syllabus: "1) share your prior experience of working on any interdisciplinary issues/research/work; 2) think about what other topics in Criminal Justice would benefit from the approaches; 3) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the interdisciplinary approaches; and 4) discuss if you would or would not consider using the approaches in studying your research interest."

Findings from Discussion Forums

"Not only do I use these methods of research in criminal justice, I also use these in other classes. Last semester in my advertising class, we were surveying the class on one particular ad. After showing the ad, the instructor asked us how the ad made us feel based on these categories: Extremely happy, happy, neutral, unhappy, extremely unhappy. The instructor used ordinal measures to conduct his survey about the ad. I also use nominal measures in statistics when I am using categorical variables. I may put variables into groups based on gender, race, religion, or car brand. Overall, chapter 4 has taught me that these research methods can be used for almost anything. They don't just apply to criminal justice research." (Topic: Concepts, Operationalization, and Measurement)

"For my discussion post, I will talk about a research method I have previously been a part of. In my WRA class freshman year here, we had an ethnography project. For our ethnography, a study of a culture, we had to collect data and do field research about the group we were writing about. I had to participate in many observational studies during the course of my research. Throughout these studies, I was allowed to submerge myself into the community and not affect it, allowing me to collect accurate data. The observational studies provided me with a very solid understanding of the culture, and proved to be a very effective research method." (Topic: Field Observation)

"For my psychology class here at MSU, we have a program called MSU ADP where we work with youth on probation. I feel this program has been beneficial or effective for the youth because it is a strength based program geared towards advocating the youth rather than punishing them for their bad behavior. Thus programs that focus on the positive reinforcers seem to be more beneficial than programs such as D.A.R.E that only implement the negative reinforcers of actions." (Topic: Program Evaluation)

References

- Lattuca, L. R., Voigt, L. J., & Fath, K. Q. (2004). Does interdisciplinarity promote learning? Theoretical support and researchable questions. *The Review of Higher Education*, 28(1), 23-48.
- Mansilla, V. B., & Duraising, E. D. (2007). Targeted assessment of students' interdisciplinary work: An empirically grounded framework proposed. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(2), 215-237.
- Newell, W. H. (1994). Designing interdisciplinary courses. *New directions for teaching and learning*, 1994(58), 35-51.