



# Studio Teaching and Interdisciplinary Education

## Reflections on Experience

Beth Walter Honadle

Professor of Political Science

and

2008-09 and 2009-10 Taft-Niehoff Faculty Community Scholar

**Mid-Continent Regional Science Association Annual Conference,  
St. Louis, Missouri, Friday, June 4, 2010**



# Outline

- Overview
- Re-cap of Two Years
- Students' Evaluations
- Summary and Conclusions

# Rationale

An interdisciplinary studio set in a neighborhood near an urban university campus is one way for regional scientists to educate and train the next generation of scholars who are grounded in practice as well as academics.

## Synopsis of Key Differences between Two Years of Teaching in Studio

Features of the studio experience (from my perspective)	Year 1	Year 2
Preparation and coordination with studio staff	Met many times with director of studio and several times with co-instructors before the quarter.	Met once with the director of the studio and never with co-instructors (2 of them different from previous year) before quarter.
Meetings	Met most Fridays with faculty teaching the studio during the quarter	Met some Fridays with faculty teaching in the studio during the quarter
Integration of classroom teaching	Attempted to teach "Community and Economic Development (POL 532) within studio	Offered a variety of options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•POL 532</li> <li>•Capstone in Political Science</li> <li>•Independent Study (grad and undergrad</li> </ul>
Team projects	Students required to work in teams	Students self-selected to work on teams
Lecturing to entire studio	A couple of lectures to all students/faculty in studio	A menu of concurrent lectures by faculty that students signed up to attend.

# Organizational Aspects

- Faculty team-building
- Student teamwork

# Classroom Integration

- Trade-off between focusing on studio versus one's own students
- Commensurate credit for time spent (an incentive)
- Student recruitment (and *caveat emptor*) important
- Common readings and assignment
- Cooperation from home department

# Lecturing

- Scheduled lectures for all
- Impromptu lectures for all
- Menu of concurrent lectures to choose from

# Students' Evaluations

- Getting feedback on studio experience from all the students not feasible
- Used an addendum to standard course evaluation for my students to obtain assessment of studio experience



# Students' Evaluations (cont'd)

## Differences:

- flexibility;
- being able to “pitch in” on what you want to work on and with whom you want to work;
- less structured
- Self-directed

# Students' Evaluations (cont'd)

## “Best Parts”:

- “getting out of the classroom”
- Working with various disciplines
- Understanding all of the “puzzle pieces”
- “getting outside experience”
- Seeing how students from outside their discipline work
- Fun of getting off campus

# Students' Evaluations (cont'd)

## Least Desirable Parts:

- Forcing oneself to work on their own
- Some disorganization (due to winter weather)
- “hard schedule”
- Always feeling behind
- Long way to studio

# Students' Evaluations (cont'd)

*Would they take a studio course again?*

- Comments were positive and enthusiastic, using words like “enjoy” to describe working with a team and doing “hands-on” work.

# Students' Evaluations (cont'd)

## Open-Ended Feedback:

- Want to hear more lectures from non political science professors
- More specific grading criteria
- Totally clear evaluation methods

# Summary and Conclusions

- Adaptation and improvisation will always be necessary
- Need to downplay community expectations
- Trade-off between teaching solo and being part of a team, especially when you aren't "in charge"
- Need to be opportunistic to offer students something special
- Know and work within, adapt to, and accept constraints (unique context)