Why CCSU Emphasizes Interdisciplinary Learning
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A cynic once joked that the world has problems but that universities have departments. Like most jokes, this one has some basis in truth. Departments organize universities into silos of knowledge that have little relation to one another and can prevent students from seeing the larger picture. In a famous study of college life, students were described as moving from course to course as “strangers in a strange land” without connecting what they were learning in different courses.

Many of the situations that students will face beyond college will be too complex to address from the perspective of a single department. For that reason, universities such as CCSU increasingly emphasize interdisciplinary approaches that enable students to study the same topic from different perspectives. Reflecting its commitment to integrate students’ learning experiences, CCSU has identified interdisciplinary and cross-curricular initiatives as one of its four distinctive elements.

Many first-year students experience interdisciplinary learning as part of our “Learning in Communities” program, which enrolls the same students in different courses that share a common theme or focus. For example, one group of students examined such current issues as cloning, genetic engineering, and the definition of life from scientific and ethical perspectives. Another group of history and chemistry students learned how conceptions of a healthy body have changed over the past century. Students in CCSU’s innovative Honors Program examine broad social and cultural issues in team-taught, interdisciplinary courses.

Many CCSU students expand their intellectual perspectives by completing one of several interdisciplinary minors. Our Urban Studies minor prepares students to address the issues and problems confronting our urban areas. CCSU’s Peace Studies program introduces students to important topics in societal, political, and diplomatic conflict resolution. Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies focuses on the experiences of women in society and history and analyzes how gender has shaped women’s experiences. The African-American studies minor examines all aspects of the African-American experience, as well as what it means to be a member of a minority group. The minor in Internet and Multimedia Services includes courses in technology, the social sciences, and humanities to cultivate students’ technical skills and awareness of the political and aesthetic values involved in applying those skills. Other interdisciplinary minors include American Studies, Cinema Studies, Gerontology, Polish Studies, and Religious Studies.

CCSU also provides the opportunity for students to earn bachelor’s degrees in interdisciplinary fields of study. For example, students graduating from the International Studies program acquire a strong academic foundation in the humanities and social sciences and develop expertise in a particular area of the world. The interdisciplinary degree in Hospitality and Tourism combines courses from the social sciences and business to prepare students for careers in a vital sector of Connecticut’s economy.

Interdisciplinary learning teaches students to think outside the box. CCSU’s interdisciplinary initiatives help students cultivate the skills and perspectives that they will need to solve problems creatively in our increasingly complex and diverse society.