

## Assessment

Assessment efforts to date suggest that “Making Connections” is making a significant difference in the quality of the Carolina undergraduate experience and helping to prepare our students for lifelong learning, discovery and engagement.

- Does participation in connected curriculum opportunities, undergraduate research and/or international studies enhance students’ ability to:
  - Integrate and apply knowledge from various disciplines?
  - Make connections between classroom learning and the outside world?

Methodology for measuring the impacts:

- Longitudinal study of entering first-year class of 2006, comparing outcomes to pre-2006 cohorts
- Tracking course-taking patterns and out-of-class activities
- Intensive interviews of sophomores and seniors
- Focus groups and surveys of faculty and students
  
- 2006 and 2007 Cohorts were more likely than previous cohort to:
  - Integrate ideas/concepts from different courses in their assignments and discussions
  - Take coursework that emphasized applying theories/concepts to practical problems in new situations
  - Plan to work on research with faculty beyond program requirements
  - Take foreign language courses
  - Plan to study abroad
- 2006 & 2007 Cohorts also were more likely to report:
  - Positive relationships with faculty and other students;
  - University contributed greatly to students knowledge, skills, personal development in solving complex real-world problems

Interviews showed:

- The students were able to take what they learned in one or more courses and apply it to other courses and to their personal lives.
- Making these connections often gave students new perspectives on how topics were interrelated and/or gave them a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- First Year Seminars have a powerful impact on new students’ academic and social engagement.

Interviews with sophomores showed:

- Active learning activities (research, internships, study abroad, service learning, independent studies) challenge students to connect the concepts learned in various courses and use them in real-life problem solving.....
- “ Research is no longer limited to.... being cooped up in a lab with test tubes....I realized it can be engaging and dynamic...not just with the intellectual gains that you’ve made, but even in your connections with people....”

- “I took a course in Geology just to get the requirement out of the way...The professor took us [on a field trip to California] to help collect samples for an environmental research project. It turned out to be one of the most fascinating things I’ve done in college. I got to be part of a real research project, and it made the stuff I learned in some other classes...come to life for me...”
- “[After I had taken a Spanish class] we had to do some work at a local school [for another class], and it turned out that many of the children were Hispanic and their parents didn’t speak English. Being able to use my Spanish to help out was great, but it also gave me some insights about people with a language barrier that will help me someday as a physician.”

#### Taking courses with international focus:

- Helped students develop a greater sense of global citizenship
- Provided opportunity to reinforce knowledge/skills from prior courses and to make connections between their international experiences and courses taken afterward

#### Studying abroad

- A transformative experience that influenced students’ choices of majors and careers
- Gave them increased sense of independence and self-reliance in moving between cultures

#### Research activities in courses and through mentored research

- Brought to life concepts/principles learned in courses
- Helped them practice applying the scientific process in their own research
- Gave them opportunities to connect with faculty and acquire mentors
- Increased their critical thinking/analytical skills
- Developed their writing and editing skills (when they co-authored research papers)