

Family Science and Psychology Meets Design: Exploring Self-Awareness through an Interdisciplinary Lens

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ABSTRACT: Society has become more global with strong connections transcending national borders and families have become more transnational in this modern world. The historical journeys that families have made across the globe, how they have made and kept homes, how their cultural values and familial dynamics have evolved, and how they maintain their cultural heritage all influence people's everyday life in direct and indirect ways. An interdisciplinary course marrying the concepts within the disciplines of psychology, social science and design was constructed and will be presented in this case study. The case study examines how the interdisciplinary course was able to expand student's self-awareness through learning about their family dynamics, history and historical family homes, current living space, and culture. The course included content such as family dynamics and family development, cultural psychology concepts, spatial development, architecture, and home design to illuminate the student's unique historical and present context. This case study delineates the journey of the interdisciplinary course demonstrating the culmination of major learnings

for the students across the course. The pedagogical methodology presented will be the infographic course map describing how the learning content from psychology, social science and design connect and build to increase understanding of self in relation to others and one's home environment. This case study provides evidence of how students were able to learn about multidisciplinary factors of psychology and design to increase meaningful learning experiences.

KEYWORDS: psychology, design, family social science, interdisciplinary

Introduction

As the stories and issues of our lives become dynamic due to the complexity and changability of the modern world, interdisciplinary study gains popularity in undergraduate study which can bring comprehensive and integrative knowledge for the students. By definition, interdisciplinary study is "a means of overcoming the isolation and discrete attitudes that separate areas of knowledge, to find ways boundaries can be crossed and fields integrated (Gunn 1992, 241)." Historically, these courses have provided a wide range of desirable education for students (Newell 1999), broadening the spectrum of understanding the subject. This is because Interdisciplinary courses offer alternatives of one discipline-specific knowledge to integration of multiple disciplines (Szostak 2007). With increasing demands for practical and engaging courses in higher education, interdisciplinary courses provide an opportunity for the students to be more creative, and broaden perspectives as they develop various skills (Newell 1999). Teaching in interdisciplinary study is not only the mere collaboration of the two fields but it requires the focus of how different disciplines can merge, intersect, and diverge in ways to examine the current reality in versatile and dynamic lens (Casey 2010). The purpose of this interdisciplinary course was to provide students with a way to gain a better understanding of how family dynamics, history, and culture impact one's self-understanding, and how the spatial translation of learning helps the person improve their own environment, behavior, and relationship. As society becomes more global where connections are made that transcend national borders and families become more transnational, there is a need to gain an understanding of how this impacts individuals. The historical journeys that families have made across the globe, how they have made and kept homes, how their cultural values and familial dynamics

have evolved, and how they maintain their cultural heritage all influence the individual in direct and indirect ways. Gaining an understanding of these origins not only provides a strong foundation from which to grow, but also may uncover deeper self-discoveries of strength and resilience. What better time to focus on self-awareness and resilience than now, after the world has been beset with a global crisis and much uncertainty.

This case study follows an interdisciplinary course that is taught by two professors of psychology and interior design. It examines how the interdisciplinary course was able to expand student's self awareness through learning about their family dynamics, history and historical family homes, current living space, and culture. This course marries the concepts within psychology and social science (family dynamics and development, cultural psychology concepts) and design (spatial development, architecture, home design) to encourage understanding of one's behavior and environment. This case study describes the construction process of the course, the developed framework delineating how the separate disciplines were integrated in a culminating final project, and provides evidence of the effectiveness from the feedback of the students. The pedagogical methodology in this interdisciplinary course increases understanding of oneself in relation to others and one's home environment as students learn about how multidisciplinary factors of psychology and design can work together to create meaningful learning experiences.

At first glance it may be surprising to consider how psychology and design are related. As the world becomes multifaceted and complex, interdisciplinary thinking is necessary to understand the world in a broader and comprehensive perspective. Since both psychology and design are deeply interrelated to human behavior, the course was focused to create learning contents which help students to understand themselves through the study of their family and culture in relation to home design. Through this collaboration, students learn how human relationships are affected by spatial organizations and compositional elements that we live with everyday, and how home environments are the reflection of family and culture. They not only learn about themselves but also understand their family better and find ways to improve or envision better family relationships as they work on the project of creating their home.

Course Design

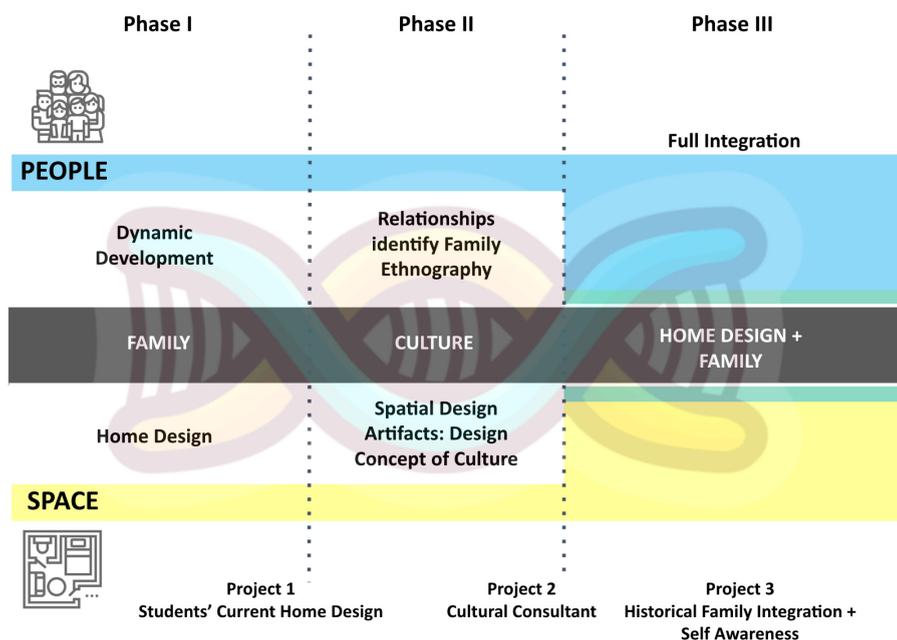
While there is a broad push for interdisciplinary pedagogy and courses across most universities, faculty may find the process of constructing such courses daunting based on the volume of effort and coordination. Interdisciplinary courses and programs are valuable and have been shown to encourage students to “take a deep approach to learning, they seek meaning, reflect on what has been learned, and internalize knowledge by creating personal understanding” (Ivanitskaya et al. 2002, 101). For this course, the instructors found common ground and excitement in the possibility of encouraging students’ self-exploration by connecting with the concepts found in psychology, family science, and design, with a specific aim of increasing Global Awareness. The course needed to be engaging and go beyond a simple understanding of content but in true interdisciplinary fashion, it needed to both complement and enhance the understanding of the respective fields and also create novel learning and knowledge.

Family Science is a field that originated within the early 1900’s growing out of the need to understand how families operated and how best to conduct systematic family research. Cultural Psychology focuses on the inquiry of culture as it relates to how people think, behave, and function and the sociocultural concepts and factors that impact groups of people. Within this course, family science and cultural psychology content was delivered to provide a framework for understanding familial dynamics and cultural concepts. Interior design is the discipline of studying interior built environment that addresses, protects, and responds to various human needs. It involves designing the space with technical knowledge to studying functionality, aesthetics, and sustainability using various design elements and principles and how they affect and support human life, and improve the safety, well-being, and health of the occupants.

The course was constructed with a series of continuous integrated content that built upon each step to a culminating product (see Figure 1 for Course Design Framework). Lectures and readings from the field of psychology provided students with a foundation for which to understand family systems and dynamics along with cultural psychological concepts and values. Lectures and assigned readings from the design were created for the

students to understand how spatial design impacts human living patterns from the natural and the built environments and how different cultural and historical design components impact human behavior. Both instructors provided students with activities each week that reflect on their current family dynamics, historical background, and home design and challenged them to apply and critically analyze concepts to their own contexts.

Figure 1. Course Design Framework



The course was constructed to have three phases that culminated in a cohesive interdisciplinary project at the end of phase three. Both instructors brought their expertise in their subject areas for each phase with an intentional effort to explore the interplay of each at the end of the phases; the Psychology instructor focused on the psychology of family and relationships, and the Design instructor focused on the design of family homes.

Phase 1 centered on the topic of family. The Psychology instructor instructed on the social science of families, their relationship dynamics and development, and the Design instructor instructed on the home space of

families, their home design and historical and cultural design influences on family homes. At the end of phase one students were tasked with exploring the interplay of family dynamics and development, and the family home by relating it to their own families. This assignment involved both a reflection and visual of how the family home was set up, the flow, boundaries, hierarchical spaces, and functional family uses for the space within their family home. This assignment allowed for them to gain a deeper understanding of how family processes affect design and how design affects family processes (i.e. greater boundaries for parental unit, increased flow and congregating in kitchen areas, etc.).

Phase 2 centered on the topic of culture. The Psychology instructor instructed on the psychological concepts of culture and cultural identity, and the Design instructor instructed on the spatial design and cultural and historical artifacts related to home design. At the end of phase two, students were tasked with developing an interview to use with a peer who will act as a cultural consultant. This project involved interviewing a peer that they were paired with- a project called "Interviewing a Cultural Consultant". The objective of this interactive project was to invite students to both enact the semi-formal ethnographic interview engaging in qualitative inquiry (as the interviewer) and also to embody a knowledgeable expert of their own cultural group (as the interviewee). It was meant to challenge them to ask and be asked questions that they may not have thought of before. Questions ranged from their family's living space, the cultural rituals and traditions practices, the values that were important in their family, and also specific cultural artifacts that were given a place of honor within their homes. Within this assignment, students both interviewed and were interviewed about how families enacted culture in their homes and within their relationships (i.e. altars within the home, coming-of-age events, cultural artifacts and designs in religious celebrations, etc.). This assignment allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of how family culture interlocked with cultural design for their own families but also their peers who hailed from other cultures. When coincidentally they were paired with a peer from the same culture, they were able to explore the similarities and differences by which each of their families embodied their shared culture.

Phase 3 was the integration phase. Students were provided with support to explore using a historical ethnographic lens the cultures from which they and their families came. For this integrative project, students were asked to go beyond the recent past of their family and cultural group, and look at where and how their ancestors lived. This project required an exploration of the historical contexts of their great grandparents- how their family was organized as it was reflected within the home design, what cultural values were prioritized, what cultural practices were celebrated and how, larger architectural features that connected with their family's culture, and what it was like for someone of their age in their family at that time. Students were also invited to recreate and draw from images of the typical home layout of that time to explore how families used the home and what functions specific design features served in maintaining family and cultural values. Finally, students were asked to design their future home integrating a) historical cultural artifacts, and b) family dynamics and values. The deliverables for this Final Project involved a presentation where students had the opportunity to orally present their findings and designs, and also engage with their peers in class about each other's projects. This allowed each student to showcase their work. This assignment aligns with established research findings that link the importance of ethnic and racial identity and belongingness with self-esteem (Hernandez, et. al. 2017; Umana-Taylor 2004). Additionally, students are exposed to other historical-cultural learnings and how it informs familial values and living spaces, truly embodying the Global Awareness philosophy of this course.

Student feedback

Markers of efficacy when evaluating the success of a course are multiple and because this course is a novel design without longitudinal evaluative data, the most distinct evidence came from the student's feedback. This course was piloted for two terms and at the end of the course, a survey was provided to students asking them questions about both their experience and learning process in the course.

When the students were asked how family dynamics, ethnicity and culture impacted the design of a home, all the students described a greater awareness of familial and cultural factors related to design. Students described that what they had previously seen as an unimportant factor was key to how they saw their family interact and that design features such as color and the family space became more meaningful to them as they reflected on their culture. Students also concluded that the design of a home should be unique and cater to the uniqueness of a family and culture. When students were asked about the everyday cultural practices around their home that they had become cognizant of, the students reported that many of these practices and rituals were known but they were able to connect them to their family and were motivated to practice them more as they reflected on their significance.

When the students were asked what they enjoyed about the course, they indicated that the pace of the course was comfortable and enjoyable which provided flexibility in the completion of projects. Students shared that they enjoyed learning about other people's family dynamics and sharing cultural aspects for the final project. Many students pointed out that they enjoyed learning about the connection between psychology and design because it allowed them to understand themselves and their culture in the relationship between those two disciplines. Students provided some insights into how they wish this course can be enhanced next time. Generally, students noted that the structure of the course should be kept. They suggested the possibility of having this course in person rather than online, so they can engage with others more.

The prevailing theme from the student's responses were that they arrived at greater insight of themselves, their family, culture, and home space, and a greater appreciation of how design features were interwoven with familial and cultural values.

Conclusion

As society becomes more global and families have become more transnational it is important to explore how people have made and kept homes and how their cultural values and familial dynamics have evolved. Interdisciplinary

courses provide the opportunity and space to explore these important human experiences and for this case study, was able to marry the concepts within the disciplines of psychology, social science and design. Students through a course like this are supported in raising their self-awareness through learning about their family dynamics, history and historical family homes, current living space, and culture. While the process of constructing an interdisciplinary course can be daunting, due to the investment in time and energy, the gains and value of a course like this one was apparent in not just the creation of a strong framework that could be used for future projects but also in the words and discoveries reported by the students themselves.

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