

## **Thematic Focus Teaching Guidelines**

Date: Created and approved by the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC), February, 2022. Updated in August, 2022.

### **Course Overview**

The Thematic Focus courses play a critical role in the Integrations Curriculum. These courses offer students a chance to explore and critically examine in depth a theme of their choosing.

While these 4-credit, 200- or 300-level courses can count toward the major, they have several obligations to the general education program. These courses are dedicated to a single theme, include a common reading on that theme, contribute to the Integrated Portfolio, and introduce students to the liberal arts and sciences goal of studying a diverse array of disciplinary approaches. They can be on any topic within one of the themes. Faculty who teach a Thematic Focus class on the same theme will be meeting to select a common reading for their themed classes and to discuss possible ways to maximize integration across sections. Faculty who teach Thematic Encounter courses will be encouraged to attend these discussions. In cases where these courses are team taught by two faculty members with different methodological approaches, they can count as two distinct Ways of Thinking.

Requirements: An artifact for the portfolio representing engagement with the Theme, assignments for assessment of Integrations Curriculum Learning Goals, use of the common reading, and introducing students to the liberal arts and sciences goal of studying a diverse array of disciplinary approaches.

### **Themes**

The role of the themes in the Integrations curriculum is to take the breadth provided by a liberal arts and sciences education and use the themes to show the connections across, and value of, different disciplinary approaches. The themes allow students and faculty alike to begin recognizing the presence of, and more importantly, the value of, using different Ways of Thinking to navigate the issues and questions that matter most.

In Thematic Focus courses the theme should constitute the primary course content and be woven throughout the course. While there is no minimal number of hours that the themes must address, and we recognize that non-thematic course content may sometimes be necessary to study the theme, the majority of the assignments (readings and student work) should directly address the theme. The expectation is that at least 50% of the course is dedicated to exploring the theme.

### **Learning Outcomes**

#### Analyzing Texts – Intermediate

Students evaluate texts for significance, relevance to the students' goals, and make connections among texts and/or disciplines.

### Collaboration - Intermediate

Students use group roles effectively, build constructively on the work of others, incorporate multiple perspectives into the work of the group, and produce independent work that advances the project.

### Information Literacy – Intermediate

Students locate relevant information using well-designed search strategies, evaluate and use appropriate and multiple resources, and articulate why using information has many ethical and legal implications. Note: Faculty are strongly encouraged to bring a reference librarian into the class to help teach information literacy.

Click [here](#) for a full list of scaffolded learning outcome

## **Curriculum Guidelines for Thematic Focus**

Students must take a minimum of three courses on the same theme in no fewer than two separate departments. At least one of these must be a Thematic Focus class.

### **Requirements**

- This course must be a 4-credit course
- Prerequisites: Learning Foundations; Pre or co-requisite: CSD:I, Theological Explorations

### **Required Elements for a Thematic Focus Class**

In applying for and receiving a Thematic Focus designation for a class, faculty agree to:

- Require an assignment that incorporates the theme.
  - The assignment can be any artifact authentic to the individual course. A paper, a recording of a performance, an image of a work of art, a musical composition, a recording of a presentation, or a model or computer program.
  - This assignment may also meet the Analyzing Text and Information Literacy Outcomes.
  - This assignment may also demonstrate the student's use of the course's disciplinary approach and/or use of the course's Way of Thinking
- Require that students submit a short reflection about their artifact's relationship to the theme.
  - This artifact could also reflect on how the course's disciplinary approach and/or Way of Thinking is used to examine the theme.
- If the Theme artifact/assignment or the Reflection on the theme does not also demonstrate the use of the course's disciplinary approach and/or use of the course's designated Way of Thinking, require that students submit an artifact that demonstrates how students the course's disciplinary approach and/or Way of Thinking is used to examine the theme.
  - This artifact could be a reflection or other assignment.

- This artifact could be, but is not required to be, the same as the required reflection on the theme.
- If the assignment demonstrating the theme does not also address the Analyzing Texts and Information Literacy Learning Outcomes attached to the class, you commit to an additional assignment (or assignments) where students demonstrate proficiency in those outcomes.
- Require that students complete and submit to their portfolio three DEAL reflection prompts, one each, for:
  - Collaboration
  - Information Literacy
- Assign students the common reading for your course's designated theme.

### **Teaching Guidelines**

Faculty are encouraged to make use of the Teaching Resources page on the Integrations Curriculum website, particularly in teaching the Collaboration Goal. Select "Teaching Resources from the menu on the right from this page: <https://www.csbsju.edu/integrations-curriculum/faculty-resources>).

As noted above, regarding the Intermediate Information Literacy goal, faculty are strongly encouraged to work with the reference librarians in teaching this goal. You may also discuss how you plan to work with the librarians in your response to the Information Literacy outcome question on the course proposal form.

### **A Diverse Array of Disciplinary Approaches**

This course will "introduce students to the liberal arts and sciences goal of studying a diverse array of disciplinary approaches." The goal of this requirement is that students will have a chance to intentionally and formally think about why we have multiple disciplinary approaches to learning about and studying the world.

We recognize that this is a daunting requirement of this course. While many faculty have interdisciplinary training, we do not expect faculty to be experts on other disciplines or Ways of Thinking. Instead, faculty will need to develop a basic understanding of other disciplines and be willing to expose students to those via readings, projects, co-curricular presentations, discussions, and assignments.

The students themselves will already be well into their undergraduate education and many will be familiar with the assumptions and methods of their different disciplines or from previous courses addressing the same theme. They too, or perhaps especially, will be valuable resources.

The GECC, in proposal review, is asking that faculty address at least one other disciplinary approach, in addition to the course's designated disciplinary approach, in a meaningful way.

### **Common Reading**

Common readings are a high-impact practice used to foster community, promote learning inside and outside the classroom, and help standardize otherwise disparate course content. All faculty teaching in a theme will be invited to take part in discussions to select the common reading for each theme. The common readings will take various forms but are intended to compliment course content and not take up an inordinate amount of class time.

## Themes

It is important to remember that the themes are broad – you can approach the theme from many different angles and address many possible different aspects of the theme. The examples provided below are illustrative only – there are countless ways that each of these themes could be explored. A course focused on the Truth theme, for example, using the Social World Way of Thinking, might address questions such as: *How do we deceive ourselves? How is our perception of reality distorted by our beliefs and understanding of the world? How do I present a false persona that paints me in a favorable light? How do people misunderstand or misuse scientific findings and results? How do scientists, knowingly and unknowingly, distort their understanding of the world by using lax practices? How do scientists decide what counts as truth?*

### *Truth*

This theme examines what truth is, why it is valuable, how it shapes choices and our perceptions of ourselves and our world. This theme might explore efforts to discover and promote truth, or the ways in which lies, errors, biases, or faulty science subvert, obscure, and misidentify truth.

Courses in this theme might study:

- **Abstract Structures:** Examine and analyze the logical structure of arguments and their fallacies or use statistical analysis to identify the truths hidden in large data sets or complex systems
- **Artistic Expression:** The roles of artifice and authenticity in artistic expression or ways of illuminating truth or telling lies through representation in the arts.
- **Human Experience:** Human efforts to discover eternal and universal truths or the risks and consequences of telling the truth.
- **Natural World:** Ways of illuminating truth through scientific research or developing scientific literacy.
- **Social World:** Ways in which our beliefs can obscure truths about ourselves or our world, how our biases can distort truth, or the processes and consequences of deceiving ourselves and others.

### *Movement*

This theme examines the interactions of ideas, people, energy, information, or matter as they flow from one location, literal or metaphorical, to another. This theme recognizes that movement can occur across conceptual, historical and stylistic boundaries, and that humans, other animals, and even the most basic components of our world move in one form or another, and often, from one form to another.

Courses in this theme might study:

- **Abstract Structures:** Modeling natural resource or information transfers, immigration patterns, or effects of ecological invasions or examining how linguistic structure crosses borders.
- **Artistic Expression:** How theater, music, or art, transmit ideas across borders or how ideas and approaches come in contact with one another.
- **Human Experience:** The ways in which literature is used to understand migration, or histories of immigration for different countries and communities.
- **Natural World:** Concepts in epidemiology, transfer of natural resources and technology, food and agricultural practices, or the ecological interactions in food chains.
- **Social World:** Past or present political, economic, or cultural causes of immigration or barriers to migration.

### *Justice*

This theme focuses on historical and contemporary social change, whether forms of oppression or advocacy for human dignity and inclusion. Courses might explore concepts of justice, or historical or contemporary calls for fair and equitable conditions, institutions and laws, or the fight for human rights and equality, or various policies and movements that have restricted the same.

Courses in this theme might study:

- **Abstract Structures:** Model or use data and statistical models to examine the impact of different policies on social change/social justice concerns such as income inequality.
- **Artistic Expression:** Explore the use of visual art, literature, and performance that advocate for or against social justice or to document or to critique social change.
- **Human Experience:** Study histories of enslavement or efforts to overthrow or recover from colonial oppression, or philosophical perspectives on justice.
- **Natural World:** Study the use of science or technology, past or present, to maintain inequitable conditions or alleviate human suffering.
- **Social World:** Examine political activism, or income and wealth inequality.