

## INTEGRATIVE LEARNING AT ITHACA COLLEGE

In the Ithaca College mission statement we state that “knowledge is acquired through discipline, competence is established when knowledge is tempered by experience, and character is developed when competence is exercised for the benefit of others.” This concept paper presents an overview of how this mission can be more fully enacted, by creating college-wide opportunities for students to experience integrative learning. This concept has been under discussion as an outcome of the strategic visioning process, under the title of Ithaca College’s Integrative Curriculum, or (IC)<sup>2</sup>.

Ithaca College has a truly unique place in today’s higher education environment, resulting from more than a century of experience offering liberal learning informed by professional practice. We have the opportunity to differentiate ourselves from other colleges and universities by taking new approaches to our longstanding traditions and core commitments. Our strategic visioning process provides a venue for breakthrough ideas that can allow us to take our rightful place among the premier comprehensive colleges in the country.

Ithaca College can meet this goal by delivering an undergraduate experience characterized by substantive knowledge production, professional practice, and entrepreneurial innovation. And we can do so in ways that are original and distinctive, making use of the college’s core strengths and creative energies, giving us a unique, creative and compelling story to tell, both to prospective students and to our future friends and supporters. This concept can apply equally well to our graduate and post-baccalaureate certificate programs, with many opportunities to integrate student learning across the various schools and to intertwine baccalaureate studies with the graduate curriculum.

The integrative learning concept could be the cornerstone supporting all Ithaca College programs and degrees. By developing flexible and distinctive models of collaborative teaching and learning, we could create intentional communities of practice designed to produce measurable student outcomes – creative, intellectual and professional – across the college. By valuing all of the disciplines taught at IC, we could nurture a culture of collaboration that would support exciting new opportunities for teaching and learning.

At full implementation, integrative learning could be the defining characteristic of an Ithaca College education. Students would complete their undergraduate degrees in traditional programs of study characterized by academic rigor and disciplinary integrity. The knowledge and skills gained through these programs could serve as the basis for applied multidisciplinary experiences designed to ensure that our students graduate as literate, entrepreneurial and engaged citizens. In addition, students’ first two years at Ithaca College – the two years most critical to retention and success – could be infused with learning experiences and opportunities designed to create strong community connections and affiliations; nurture cultural and media literacy skills critical to informed citizenship; confirm the value of creative collaboration, innovation, application and

realized learning; and establish individual responsibility for shared outcomes. In the junior and senior years, undergraduates could take advantage of the opportunity to work and learn together with graduate students in ways that provide enrichment and academic challenge, in addition to providing natural bridges for those with the aptitude and interest to go on to post-baccalaureate programs.

It's worth noting that integrative learning is not a new concept. Yale's MBA program and the University of Vermont's Medical School are among the best-known programs that have adopted a holistic approach to preparing students for the challenges that await them. The collaboration sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching supports integrative learning projects at a variety of campuses, demonstrating the different ways that integrative learning can be defined and developed. Ithaca has the potential to develop this concept in its own way and as a defining characteristic of every student's experience. An effective integrative learning program could allow Ithaca College to take a true leadership role within higher education. With the richness and depth of our curriculum, the wide variety of programs we offer, our long-standing commitment to supporting students' individual growth, and the quality of our faculty across the entire institution, this is a role for which we are uniquely well-positioned.

With a strong program of integrative learning, every student could graduate from Ithaca College with both disciplinary or interdisciplinary mastery *and* unique skills and experiences derived from an intentional integrated curriculum. Through such a curriculum, we could foster multiple forms of literacy, creative and original thinking, entrepreneurship, teamwork, project execution and leadership. Delivery of this curriculum would take place as it does now – in the major, in general education, and in co- and extra-curricular activities. The area with perhaps the greatest opportunity to support and enhance integrative learning is general education, which could be redesigned to ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from IC's unique combination of liberal arts and professional practice.

An integrative learning approach could deliver to Ithaca's next generation of students the kind of innovation, quality, energy and uniquely collaborative learning environment that would distinguish our college in the marketplace. Perhaps most importantly, this approach can help us envision our future in strategically effective ways, while also reaffirming the college's mission, values, traditions, and core commitments. It offers a natural next step in our institutional evolution toward excellence.