

## **Implementing Thematic IFP Clusters at FAU**

### Abstract

Thematic IFP clusters address a central theme or topic by linking courses from across the IFP curriculum. Course experiences (e.g., activities, assignments, projects) in each of the cluster courses are organized around this central theme. The themes are usually contemporary topics or issues selected to pique students' interests. Enrolling in an IFP thematic cluster affords students an opportunity to study the topic in-depth from multiple disciplinary perspectives and methods of inquiry. This approach also helps students understand the connections among disciplines. Clusters include a broad selection of lower-division general education courses so that students with diverse majors can easily participate. Proponents of thematic clusters say that students are more likely to stay engaged and motivated in their learning, as the courses not only build upon an area of personal interest but can often be used to satisfy multiple requirements (major, IFP, electives). In this brief, we will present a set of proposed pilot themes and IFP courses. We will also list a set of discussion topics and participation requirements that will be useful in creating and supporting a sustained thematic IFP program at FAU.

### **The IFP program at FAU**

The IFP program at FAU has a 36-hour requirement, 15 hours of which are determined by the state. Courses fall into six foundation areas: Written Communication, Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning, Global Citizenship, Science in the Natural World, and Humanities. The proposed thematic cluster option is meant to enhance, not replace, the existing IFP program.

### **Thematic Learning**

Thematic instruction involves addressing a theme or topic through multiple courses. The approach is often interdisciplinary, with knowledge and skills becoming integrated across disciplines. Students learn to apply knowledge from different perspectives and are exposed to multiple methods of inquiry. Thematic education often involves experiential learning opportunities, active participation, cooperative learning, and shared projects. Students are afforded an opportunity to learn in a larger context and can see connections across disciplines.

Themed clusters can differ in their degree of integration and it is not uncommon for the level of integration to increase as the courses are revised through faculty communication and cooperation. For example, a cluster with a low degree of integration may involve a set of individual courses that separately address a topic or theme. A more integrated cluster would implement shared learning outcomes and guiding questions. More mature clusters may share classroom assignments or integrate student learning experiences so that students can gain a more holistic perspective. A fully integrated thematic cluster might have a culminating project and provide students completing the cluster with some type of transcript acknowledgement or certificate. Some universities have gone a step further and converted their thematic clusters into minor programs.

### **Thematic Cluster Parameters at FAU**

The purpose of the thematic clusters is to attract students from a broad range of majors and involve them in courses from across the IFP. The following initial parameters have been identified for this program:

- Clusters will consist of between 3-6 courses.
- Not all sections of a course need to be included in the thematic cluster.
- Students select a minimum of three courses (9 credits).
- Courses should be offered across foundation areas so that students do not take more courses than they need for the IFP.
- Students who complete the course requirements will be eligible for a certificate or transcript designation.
- Courses and themes must be approved by the Core Curriculum Committee.
- The cluster course must stress the theme in a minimum of six components (e.g., lectures). The syllabus should clearly identify those course components relating to the cluster.
- It is a faculty driven process and faculty must meet to communicate outcomes and coordinate their courses.
- Courses approved must demonstrate evidence of coordinated student learning outcomes.
- Courses must be open to all students.

### **Pilot Themes**

Appendix A outlines the six thematic clusters proffered thus far. Additional themes are encouraged.

## Appendix A: Proposed IFP Themes

### Take General Education (IFP) Courses Related to Your Professional Interests & Professional Goals

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#### *What is an IFP Thematic Cluster?*

IFP thematic clusters address a central theme or topic by linking courses from across the IFP curriculum. Each theme represents a twenty-first century challenge, and course experiences (e.g., activities, assignments, projects) in each of the courses are organized around this challenge.

#### *Why Should I take an IFP Thematic Cluster?*

Enrolling in an IFP thematic cluster affords students an opportunity to study the topic in-depth from multiple disciplinary perspectives and from diverse methods of inquiry. This approach also helps students understand the connections between disciplines. Students are more likely to stay engaged and motivated in their learning, as the courses not only build upon an area of personal interest, but can often be used to satisfy multiple requirements (major, IFP, electives).

#### *What IFP Thematic Clusters are Available?*

Students should be aware that some courses listed may not apply toward their major. Be particularly careful in choosing science and mathematics courses, for example, because some majors require courses other than those listed in the clusters. Please choose courses in a particular cluster in consultation with an advisor in University Advising Services (UAS). Schedule an appointment using [Success Network](#).



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CHANGE**



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and SOCIETY**



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AND INQUIRY**



**RACE AND  
RACIAL  
INEQUALITY**



**GLOBAL  
STUDIES**



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