

60-Second SoTL

Episode 39 – Student Perspectives on the Importance of Course Coordination in Programs of Study

(Piano Music)

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Jessie L. Moore:

How does the coordination of courses within a degree program affect student satisfaction with their studies? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

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(Piano Music)

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In "Coordination of Courses in University Programmes and Students' Experiences of Their Studies: Student Perspectives on the Importance of Course Coordination," published as an open-access article in *Quality in Higher Education*, Ola Holmström and Ola Stjärnhagen consider how students assess course coordination within their programs and how coordination impacts their satisfaction with their studies.

The researchers draw on a university-wide survey administered in 2017-2018 at Lund University in Sweden. As a result, their study also offers a rich example of how studies of learning and teaching can draw on institutional data.

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More than 5,700 students completed the survey and initial analysis suggested that coordination among courses in a degree program correlated with student satisfaction with their studies, prompting Holmström and Stjärnhagen to conduct additional statistical analysis to learn more about the correlation.

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Coordination among courses in a degree program can include attention to content, workload, administrative routines, and performance requirements. The authors note that when course alignment is high – that is, when there's constructive alignment at the program level – instructors in a program don't view their course as an isolated unit. Instead, instructors attend to the distribution of the program's learning outcomes and teaching practices across courses in the program, and any repetition is

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intentional to facilitate progression in students' knowledge development. Curriculum mapping and backwards design offer two strategies for achieving intentional, coordinated alignment across courses.

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To examine student perspectives on course coordination, Holmström and Stjärnhagen extracted responses from 2,391 students who were studying in degree programs and were not in their first year of study – when they might not have had as much experience with their holistic program. This subset of survey participants represented more than 200 university programs.

The majority of students indicated that courses in their programs were linked in good, reasonable, or logical ways. They were more critical about incoherence in information provided by teachers of different courses and about differences in requirements and workloads between courses.

Yet the more content students were with course coordination within their degree program, the more content they were with their studies. While other factors also correlate with satisfaction – completing courses within the set time, and students' overall well-being, for example – the correlation with course coordination is highly statistically significant and persists even when analysis controls for other factors.

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As the authors note, this study highlights the importance of instructors collaborating across courses and developing shared responsibility for degree programs as a whole. To learn more about this study, follow the link in our show notes to read the open access article and to review our supplemental resources for this episode.

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(Piano Music)

Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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