

2006
Alan Blizzard Award
First Annual Honourable Mention

**Process Based Learning: A Unique Theoretical and Active Learning Model of
Faculty Collaboration, Student Collaboration and
Experiential Learning**

Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia, Canada



Back Row (L to R): Elizabeth Beaton, Rob Gildert, Barry Moore, Richard MacKinnon and John Hudec

Front Row (L to R): Pam Seville, Nicole Claener, and Jane Connell

Process Based Learning: A Unique Theoretical and Active Learning Model of Faculty Collaboration, Student Collaboration and Experiential Learning

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Abstract

Cape Breton University's Community Studies Department works collaboratively to design, implement, and evaluate the core courses of the Bachelor of Arts Community Studies (BACS) degree program. Unlike other departments, the Community Studies department is not formed around disciplinary lines. The faculty includes backgrounds from adult education, women's studies, philosophy, sociology, kinesiology, folklore and social work. This mixture of backgrounds along with the ability to work collaboratively has been a source of strength for the department.

The core courses are named Problem Centered Studies (PCS). The aim of PCS courses is to facilitate the development of skills valuable for students in their capacity as engaged citizens, workers in a rapidly changing economic environment, and as creative individuals. To develop these attitudes and capabilities, the department encourages cooperative, non-competitive pedagogies. Students work together in small groups of approximately eight students. A high degree of self-direction and organization develops as students conduct research and write essays collaboratively on topics of mutual interest. The process based learning components in the PCS model include: critical thinking; problem solving; group work and group dynamics; reflective learning; self-directed learning; community involvement and experiential learning. The interaction of these components is dynamic, changing from group to group and from project to project.

The role of the faculty is to facilitate the learning objectives for the students rather than lecturing on specific topics. The faculty consults with each other extensively in both formal and informal settings. Consultation, collaboration and the sharing of materials and ideas are paramount to their teaching in a non-traditional environment. Reviewing teaching methods, course outlines and objectives as well as graduate outcomes are ongoing practices. During the year, the faculty has full-day workshops reviewing the past academic year and planning for the next. As students are asked to reflect on their learning, so too do the faculty ask this of themselves.

It is the collaborative effort of the department that creates the distinctive core courses for the program and ultimately contributes to the total BACS learning experience for the students. The PCS 300 Community Intervention course highlights faculty collaboration, student collaboration, experiential learning, and theory. Students in this course are expected to conduct intervention projects that will have a positive impact on the local community. The specific project presented for the Alan Blizzard Award is the collaborative effort of the team of PCS faculty as they implement the PCS 300 Community Intervention course.