

Questions for President Kusch on Deep Learning, the 4Is, the Learning Pattern, and SMI

1. To preface my questions, I love the 4Is of course design, and they have been invaluable to me in developing curriculum and evaluating program courses. I've read and almost memorized the definitions of Immersive, Integrated, Interactive and Iterative as they appear in our Ensign College Deep Learning Booklet.

I think I'm doing a good job with immersive experiences, assignments, and projects in my program courses, but then I hear other descriptions and definitions of "immersive," and I leave meetings and trainings completely confused. My questions are as follows:

"If I am following the definition of "immersive" as it appears in the Deep Learning booklet, am I aligned with College expectations?"

I have been told that "Immersive" as defined in the Deep Learning Booklet is not the same as Subject Matter Immersion. I need a better understanding of Subject Matter Immersion and how it is different from the "Immersive" defined in the Deep Learning booklet.

What is Subject Matter Immersion and how is it different from the "Immersive" defined in the Deep Learning booklet?

As a program chair, am I expected to follow the "Immersive" definition in the Deep Learning booklet or the definition of subject matter immersion? I apologize for the length of this question.

Answer:

If you are following the definition of "immersive" as it appears in "Deep Learning – A Holistic Approach to Learning," you are definitely on the right track. The definition of immersive in the brochure is "Students immerse themselves in real-world experiences." If your courses provide real world or simulated experiences, you are creating a learning environment where deep learning is best achieved and where students act to become capable and trusted disciples of Jesus Christ. With immersive experiences embedded in your course curriculum, you are aligned with College expectations. However, the goal is immersive environments where student agency is a driving factor.

Keep in mind your course curriculum should also be integrated, interactive, and iterative. The 4Is guide course curriculum design, and the Learning Pattern guides how we teach and how students learn. Students prepare, teach one another, ponder and prove. The 4Is and the Learning Pattern are essential elements of a well-developed Ensign College course.

To define subject matter immersion (SMI), it is to “fully immerse and envelop students in a subject or discipline, where they take responsibility for what they learn, how they will learn, how they will demonstrate mastery of the subject, and even how they will earn a final grade in the course.”

When thinking about SMI, imagine a spectrum. One end of the spectrum is what happens in our BUS 160 class. Students have the course outcomes to guide them, but the students design the course syllabus, which includes identifying the classroom resources and readings, assignments, projects, and grading rubrics.

This is not the expectation for every Ensign College course. In fact, we expect most courses will fall below this point on the spectrum. We do, however, expect program chairs to find ways to include SMI principles into the course curriculum.

For example, think about ways you can give students more choice and agency. Let students define the expectations for classroom behavior. Explore giving students the opportunity to design an assignment, project, or exercise in a course. Identify new and creative ways your students can explain, teach, and demonstrate learned concepts and content. Leave some “white space” in the course curriculum where students identify topics relevant to their experience that they would like to research and share with their peers.

We fully understand that the learning outcomes in many courses require technical skill instruction and a teacher-developed syllabus. We know in these courses students will need basic content and knowledge before they embark on an SMI experience. However, even in these courses we encourage program chairs to find ways to remove scaffolding if appropriate. The goal is to create independent, life-long learners, who are prepared for work environments where new employee scaffolding may be scarce or even non-existent.

Program chairs should consider, understand and apply both definitions (Immersive and SMI) in their course design. We acknowledge these course design decisions ultimately rest with the program chair. You were hired as a program chair for your subject knowledge and expertise, and in this role, only you can determine the best and most appropriate way to incorporate the Learning Pattern, the 4-I’s and SMI into your program. We support you in your role and effort to move these principles forward in every Ensign College program.

There are many people available to help you, including the Director of Teaching and Learning, the Director of Curriculum, the Dean of Faculty, and the Director of Instructional Design.

2. Does every immersive experience require a component of a soft skill assessment, and do soft skill assessments require outside assessors or can I effectively assess my students myself?

Answer:

Every immersive experience does not require a soft skill assessment. However, the assessment of soft skills in all Ensign College programs is essential. Referring to “Deep Learning – A Holistic Approach to Learning,” integrated (one of the 4Is) is defined as “Students integrate technical and soft skills while strengthening their discipleship.” It is important to examine your overall program and courses and look for ways to evaluate your students’ soft skills. As the definition of “integrated” clearly states technical and soft skills should be seamlessly blended in every course.

There are many ways to assess soft skills, and an instructor can effectively assess their students using appropriate rubrics and tools. The College-Wide Capabilities are designed to help learners demonstrate important soft skills, including professionalism, teamwork and leadership, communication and problem solving. Rubrics are available to assist instructors in assessing these skills in the classroom.

If a program chair needs help in assessing soft skills in their program, we have a team of trained assessors who are available to assist you. The Director of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Instructional Design can help you develop a variety of soft skill assessment methods.

3. How do you envision SMI being applied in a foundational, hard skills course (like BAP, development or prerequisite math classes, etc.)? Can you address how this might be similar to, and also different from, the way these might look in a soft skills class?

Answer:

First, there are no Ensign College courses that should be identified as “soft skills” only classes. All of our courses should be designed to prepare students with hard and soft skills for the world of work. All courses should have learning outcomes, appropriate content, and academic rigor. Remember the definition of “integrated” from the 4Is of course development, “Students integrate technical and soft skills while strengthening their discipleship.”

With that said, referring back to the SMI spectrum, in a foundational hard-skills course, look for easy and effective ways to give students more agency and responsibility for learning. It is completely understood that foundational skills courses will not allow as many options for SMI application as a more-advanced course, when the students have stronger foundational knowledge.

In all courses, however, remember to look for ways to remove scaffolding and help your students become independent learners. This can be done in a hard-skills course. Start with small changes, keep it simple, and evaluate student progress when scaffolding is removed. We never underestimate how important it is for students to master foundational knowledge so they are ready to move to the next course.

4. Is it appropriate to assess a student's individual spiritual or emotional experience in our class activities? Can an assessor who comes into a classroom for a case study accurately assess a student's joy, kindness, and/or testimony?

Answer:

Yes and yes!

5. To what degree should students take an active part in developing SMI curriculum, and how much structure should they be given in that process? What limitations would you place on a students' curriculum development involvement?

Answer:

This depends on the course learning outcomes and the students' foundational skills. For example, in a beginning accounting class, curriculum will most likely be more structured as the student is developing core subject knowledge. SMI may come into play as the student requires less scaffolding and is prepared to apply their core knowledge in a student-designed project or activity. Again, even in a foundational course, the course designer should look for ways to provide learner-centered experiences, giving the students increased agency and responsibility for their learning.

6. What initial learning experiences are required before Subject Matter Immersion can take place?

Answer:

See question #5

7. I feel like the projects in my program are immersive. How can I make the class instruction more immersive?

Answer:

There are many ways to instruct a class using learner-centered methods, which can successfully replace lectures and PP presentations. Maryellen Weimer's "Learner-Centered Teaching" has great ideas and concepts that will help. For example, "Teachers let students do more learning tasks," and "Teachers do less telling so that students can do more discovering."

Although we have focused on "immersive," there are also three other "Is" that need to be considered in course design. Courses need to be "interactive" with students receiving "significant interaction with their instructor, peers, and industry professionals." If the

Learning Pattern is applied in courses, student will teach one another and assume more responsibility for learning tasks. Again, look to the College resources for ideas on how to implement learner-centered rather than teacher-centered classroom strategies.

8. Why do we have so many case studies in the courses, when there could be other alternatives that could be considered immersive?

Answer:

Case studies are a great way to bring the real world into the classroom, but you are absolutely right, there are many ways to make a course immersive. For example, students could work directly with an employer to identify and complete a project that could solve a problem in the business or organization.

In fact, the classic definition of case study, like an HBS case study, does not meet the definition of SMI. These types of cases can be fun and provide great content, but because they provide no student agency in the design, they are not representative of SMI principles.

Please do not think that a case study is the only way to ensure that a course is immersive. In fact, one of the most exciting things about what we are doing with the 4I's and SMI is sharing with each other new and innovative ways to implement these principles. We want program chairs to experiment, try new things, and share with each other. Don't be afraid to fail, and re-evaluate.

9. I have immersive experiences in my program courses but they are teacher designed. I examine a course outcome, and then use my knowledge and expertise in the field to design classroom activities or projects that “immerse the students in real world experiences” that meet the course outcomes. If I continue to follow this process, am I in alignment with the expectations of the 4Is or do I need to have the students design the projects and activities so I can be in alignment with the principles of “subject matter immersion?” I think I have mastered “immersive” as defined in the Deep Learning Booklet, but if I need to step back and turn the class over to the students so they design the projects, I worry about doing that because of the very technical nature of the subject. My students don't have the background to know what they need to know. I worry that students will not be prepared for the next class or have the necessary skills to be successful in a job. Please help me understand if I am doing enough to make my program courses “immersive.”

Answer:

See questions # 1 and # 5

You are not required to turn the class over to the students so they can design the projects. It is vital that students are prepared for the next class and have the necessary skills to be successful on the job. Concentrate on the 4Is and learner-centered teaching. As you become more comfortable, look for ways to give your students more agency and responsibility for their learning. You may find that it's a natural progression, and your students are more prepared for the next class by implementing SMI principles.

Immersive experiences can be teacher-designed and teacher-directed. According to our definition, we "immerse students in real world experiences." An immersive experience may be to assign the students to find a job (in the real world) and tailor a resume to that job. We could add a touch of SMI by asking the students to research the latest trends in resume writing, and the students design the rubric on how their resumes will be evaluated based on their research.

In the medical assisting immersive case study, the experience is teacher-designed and teacher-directed, and yet, it is extremely immersive. Students do not determine what they will demonstrate or how they will be evaluated. It is a tightly controlled environment . . . immersive, integrated, interactive and iterative.

10. Why is it seen as appropriate to have individuals outside a specific program, come to a class to grade and/or assess students in another discipline when they are unfamiliar with the subject matter?

Answer:

It is not appropriate for an outside assessor to grade or assess a student in skills that are outside their field or area of study. To be clear, at Ensign College outside evaluators in SMI experiences are trained to assess soft skills. They are not trained to evaluate technical skills.

For example, in the immersive case study in the Medical Assisting program, students are evaluated by their instructors (who have medical assisting knowledge and skills) on the hard skills. The outside assessors evaluate the student on their professional appearance, communication style, patient interaction, etc. They are not evaluating the students on how they perform medical assistant hard skills (i.e., taking blood pressure, giving an injection, etc.). These skills are assessed by the medical assisting teachers.

11. Please define the specific criteria a learning experience must have to meet the definition of "SMI." Provide one example of a learning experience that would fully meet those criteria. Explain how that example fulfills each criteria.

Answer:

SMI defined . . .

To fully immerse and envelop students in a subject or discipline, where they take responsibility for what they learn, how they will learn, how they will demonstrate mastery of the subject, and even how they will earn a final grade in the course.

Example:

- 1. Students define and create the final project in the course based on their interests and learning level.***
- 2. Students identify the project outcomes to be achieved, essentially what they will learn and master.***
- 3. Students establish how they will demonstrate mastery (i.e., class presentation, demonstration, discussion, reflection paper with real-world examples, poster)***
- 4. Student establish a grading rubric based on project learning outcomes.***
- 5. Student evaluates their own learning and grade their final project.***

12. Who has the authority to determine if a course or activity meets the parameters of SMI?

Answer:

It would be our hope that the program chair would work in conjunction with the Director of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Instructional Design to determine together if a course or activity meets the parameters of SMI. The program chair has the responsibility to determine the appropriate level of SMI in a specific course and overall program, however, they should be continually reviewing their courses for ways to enhance the 4Is, the Learning Pattern, and how to incorporate SMI principles by removing scaffolding and allowing students more agency and responsibility for their learning.

13. Please define subject matter immersion. Does it always require a blank canvas and no syllabus?

Answer:

See answer # 1 and #5.

No Ensign College program chair is required to offer a course with a blank canvas and no syllabus. In fact, this does not fit our adjunct faculty model. We will continue to provide a course syllabus and the resources needed to teach a class to our adjunct faculty.

A program chair may create “white space” on the syllabus where students design a project or a class experience. As we remove scaffolding from the student, we will increase

scaffolding to the instructor. The instructor will need a teaching plan on how to manage the “white space” in the syllabus and guide students to achieve the learning outcomes.

14. How do we balance Learner-Centered teaching with the need to cover the course objectives, especially as they apply to either certifications or articulation requirements?

Answer:

Learner-centered teaching should not impact whether the learning outcomes are achieved in a course. In fact, learner-centered teaching done properly should increase the mastery of learning outcomes and promote Deep Learning.

15. Just because we can incorporate SMI into every subject, should we? Are there some subjects that lend itself to SMI better than others?

Answer:

All subjects lend themselves to SMI. To review the definition of SMI . . .

“To fully immerse and envelop students in a subject or discipline, where they take responsibility for what they learn, how they will learn, how they will demonstrate mastery of the subject, and even how they will earn a final grade in the course.”

Again, it goes back to the SMI spectrum. We are not expecting program chairs to “throw out the syllabus and let the students design the course.” However, all courses can be reviewed for opportunities to give the students more responsibility in how they learn and how they will demonstrate mastery of the subject.

Adding SMI into a course could mean asking the students to define a class mission or vision statement, and then taking 10 minutes every week to ask the student’s “How did we do this week in aligning to our mission statement? This activity does not disrupt the course scope and sequence, and it does not impact the mastery of course outcomes.

Our challenge to program chairs will continue to be . . . explore ways that SMI can be implemented into your courses.

16. We sometimes hear “subject matter immersion” and “deep learning” used interchangeably. Are they the same thing?

Answer:

From “Deep Learning – A Holistic Approach to Learning”

Deep learning is the result of a learner, acting in, with, and by faith in Christ; it is inherently a spiritual experience and evidence of the fruits of the Atonement of Jesus Christ working in the lives of the learner and the teacher. Deep learning leads to understanding – the capacity to know, do, and become – and is ultimately a gift of the spirit.

Deep learning is the goal and the outcome of our classroom efforts. Deep learning is not something we “do.” The 4Is, the Learning Pattern, SMI, learner-centered teaching and spirit-centered teaching are all tools to facilitate deep learning. When teachers and students are worthy, prepared, and have an expressed desire to learn, and assume responsibility for their learning, deep learning is fostered.

It is important to remember that “the environment that fosters and creates opportunities for deep learning is not based on one approach or activity; rather the instructor applies a variety of methods, settings, and assignments. Deep learning can be achieved in one-on-one settings, in groups both large and small, and peer-to-peer” (Deep Learning Principles, Deep Learning – A Holistic Approach to Learning).

Subject matter immersion is one classroom strategy designed to foster deeper learning. Just like the 4Is and the Learning Pattern, SMI can help establish an environment giving students more responsibility and control for their learning. SMI requires planning and teacher scaffolding. Outcomes must be identified and mastered through the learning experiences.

One last thought, notice the definition of Deep Learning . . . “is the result of a learner, acting in, with, and by faith in Christ . . . “. SMI provides an environment where students act, rather than being acted upon. SMI is a method to reach deep learning; it is associated with doing and demonstrating which leads to understanding – the capacity to know, do, and become.

17. What qualifications do student mentors to critique the instructor on SMI?

Answer:

Student mentors are not in class to critique an instructor. They are to be a positive, resource for the instructor.

18. It's the expectation that every class at Ensign College be taught in an immersive way. What is the process for making this happen?

Answer:

The goal is deep learning in all Ensign College courses. The 4Is, the Learning Pattern and SMI are methods to help achieve deep learning. Program chairs are currently reviewing all courses to evaluate if the 4Is and the Learning Patten are imbedded in the design and curriculum in all courses. The Director of Teaching and Learning is working with individual program chairs to incorporate SMI into courses.

19. How do SMI, Deep Learning and Learner-Centered teaching all fit together?

Answer:

See Question #16.

Learner-centered teaching principles and practices are a means to an end. Having a base knowledge of learner-centered methods is a key ingredient of SMI. SMI is grounded in learner-centered teaching methods. As a group of faculty, you took the 2017-2018 academic year reading, exploring, and studying Maryellen Weimer's book Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice. If you have questions about learner-centered teaching, please contact the Director of Teaching and Learning.

20. How do we help and support adjunct faculty with SMI?

Answer:

When SMI becomes a method of instruction in a course, adjunct faculty will need training and support. The institution has a responsibility to provide adequate training and support to implement SMI. Teachers must be ready to support students who are uncomfortable as they transition to SMI from a traditional learning climate. Communication between teacher and student is vital, along with formative and rapid feedback through timely assessments. The resources to support adjunct faculty and students during this transition are available through the Director of Teaching and Learning.

21. Can every class in every program really be taught in an immersive way?

Answer:

Yes, however, be sure you understand the difference between the 4Is (Immersive, Integrated, Interactive, and Iterative) and SMI. It is the expectation that all courses taught at the College will be immersive, and SMI will be explored and implemented whenever possible.

Keep in mind SMI does not mean throwing out the syllabus and turning the class over to the students. SMI means giving the students opportunities to take responsibility for what and how they will learn.

There are many ways to do this that do not disrupt the scope and sequence or the content of the course. Many ideas have been shared in Teaching Lights and faculty professional development sessions. The Director of Teaching and Learning stands ready to help program chairs explore this method (SMI) as a pathway to Deep Learning.

22. What is the vision of SMI as it pertains to General Education classes?

Answer:

SMI and learner-centered teaching will be key components in the building and design of the new General Education classes. Students will be immersed in real and relevant learning experiences, giving them more opportunities to take responsibility for their learning as they “act vs. being acted upon.” A leadership course will be offered in the Social Science area providing an SMI experience similar to BUS 160. All general education course will have a strong component of SMI, along with the 4I course framework and the Learning Pattern.
