
Didactical issues in new interdisciplinary study programs – same, different or just difficult?

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Program text

Based on a qualitative pilot study, we discuss didactical issues related to a new ID MSc program in science and how these issues are similar and different from traditional, monodisciplinary programs.

Abstract

Introduction

Interdisciplinary (ID) study programs are not new in Danish HE, but to meet current social and scientific challenges, new ID programs are appearing these years. This calls for studies on the organisation and design of the programs. Previous studies have discussed different forms of ID [1, 2] and shown that interdisciplinarity does not necessarily entail a whole new didactical approach but amplifies existing issues [3]. In this paper, we discuss such didactical issues related to a new ID MSc program in science.

Methods

The paper is based on an ongoing pilot study (incl. interviews, observations and questionnaire) of a new ID MSc program at UCPH. The study should inform the future didactical foundation of the program and outline future research into the field.

Results

Our findings show a misalignment between explicit and implied assumptions about students' backgrounds and knowledge, which leaves the students with different possibilities. The relation between the disciplinary elements as well as how the individual courses are designed (e.g., pearls on a string or snowflakes) presents the students with different challenges. While some students take the course as an elective, others take it as a part of a full program, which adds to the challenges concerning *what should be learned and how*.

Discussion

Preliminary results suggest that institutional interests and policies may interfere with some of the didactical considerations and thus the resulting quality and success of the program, for example when a program accepts students from a wide range of study programs but fails to ensure adequate proficiency or competence for following and passing the courses in the program. Questions to pursue are thus how the didactical foundation of new ID programs are similar and different from that of traditional, monodisciplinary programs and what could be ways of ensuring congruence in these programs, while still having to abide by institutional policies and regulations?

Literature

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