More Survey Data from Carleton College

The two surveys serve general college purposes better than they serve department purposes. Many faculty (commendably) construct (and aspire to) projects and assignments that involve multiple skills and literacies (information, communication, civic engagement, numbers, visuality for instance). But there's an important difference between thinking "I can formulate an assignment that integrates a variety of skills and habits of mind by its very nature" and "I have to do it all in every course."

We designed the ILP survey questions based on our reading of the relevant educational literature, which comes from traditions in the social sciences. After the first round of administering the survey, we found two ways in which the survey design limited the responses. First, the very nature of this survey was "de-constructive" by its focus on particular aspects of education. Some disciplines revel in complexity and the survey doesn't get at that very well. Second, we've learned that our first attempts at designing survey questions to measure student perception of integrative learning favor the skills and literacies outlined in the educational literature: which in turn, tend to de-value (as our culture does) the skills and habits of mind cultivated in the arts and literature (close reading of a text, creative expression, aesthetic understanding, performance, and others). Visuality made our list because of the new initiative at Carleton, not because we encountered it in any published survey example, and, not surprisingly, it's one of the skills that students self-report encountering the least. It will require a wider conversation outside the core ILP group to improve these instruments; thankfully, we have a large number of faculty and staff involved in the various initiatives.

Because the ILP survey was administered during classes (or as required homework, in the case of the Physics and Astronomy Department), we had good response from students. However, it is a long survey and this summer Institutional Research has a project to identify, by cluster analysis, which questions seem to be redundant.

On a department level, analysis of learning goals needs a finer level of granularity: for instance, by subdividing "communicating in writing" into long papers, memos, short papers, etc. that characterize the particular discipline. Another way we might think about surveying broader curricular goals is to look at categories like "field work," "textual analysis," "observations," "experimentation," etc.