Georgia Tech | Center for Serve-Learn-Sustain

SLS LINKED COURSES PROGRAM

Program Overview

"Creating sustainable communities" requires understanding issues from multiple perspectives and within broad contexts. To that end, each semester, SLS links together classes from multiple GT colleges and schools with some key community partners, under broad sustainable communities themes. Through joint projects, workshops, and activities, students, faculty, and partners together explore problems and solutions from different academic and practitioner perspectives. Faculty and students then delve more deeply into the theme through their individual classes. This structure offers the advantages of transdisciplinary collaboration without the challenges of team teaching.

Linked Courses are offered under three different themes – Community Health, Green Infrastructure, and Equitable & Sustainable Development – with each theme offered one semester per year (semesters differ depending on the year). Each theme is guided by a common transdisciplinary framework, developed with input from multiple faculty and community partners. The program aims to offer a *transdisciplinary* learning experience that both connects theory across academic disciplines and connects theory to practice by focusing on a real-world issue that does not respect disciplinary boundaries. The result is intended to be twofold. First, new perspectives on the issue, including context, problems, and potential solutions. Additionally, though, beyond "transcendence," another critical result of transdisciplinary learning is intended to be critical perspectives on our own positionality and approach to knowledge - and even questioning the legitimacy of original disciplinary approaches themselves, especially as mechanisms for achieving social change. As Rowland states, "Transdisciplinary approaches are based upon the idea that the very concept of the discipline is itself inappropriate, is outdated, or is a device to preserve special interests" (Stephen Rowland, *The Enquiring University,* 2006:94-95).

What types of faculty and courses participate?
SLS is always looking for new faculty/courses, from every college and school. Eligible courses:
1) Have 50 or fewer students (the option exists to link a single section or even one team from a bigger course)
2) Affiliate with SLS
3) Focus on a topic that can be connected to the program theme and common framework for the semester
4) Work with SLS the semester before to plan the program.

Linked Courses are planned the semester before they are executed. With SLS coordination, faculty meet with each other and community partner(s) to get to know each other, plan joint projects/activities, discuss shared goals, and agree on partnership parameters. SLS is also actively involved in the program during the program semester, coordinating joint activities and helping to coordinate communication among partners.

SLS Linked Courses Spring 2018: Green Infrastructure
In Spring Semester 2018, a Biology course and an English course worked with West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and U.S. Fish & Wildlife to collect stream monitoring data, learn about watershed history and the creek's changing role in its communities, and create communication tools based on that data. SLS developed a workshop on community-based citizen science and sponsored a joint stream monitoring mini-course, open to any other interested students and certified with a digital badge from GT Professional Education.

What does a Linked Course entail?
A Linked Course "links" with the theme, another course, and community partners in four ways, by:

1) **Collaborating with another course from a different school (and preferably college):**
   Faculty collaborate in a variety of ways to increase learning opportunities across disciplines, for example, by guest lecturing in each other's courses or creating complementary assignments (SLS maintains a Dropbox for sharing resources). Faculty teaching during Fall/Spring semesters also work with another Linked Course on a joint community partner project that serves the partner, complements the faculty members' expertise and course topics, and grows student competencies in key outcome areas - with heavy support from SLS.

2) **Collaborating with partners:**
   Faculty engage one or more community partners in their courses through guest lectures, field trips, etc.

3) **Using Linked Courses Teaching Tools to further integrate the theme into the course:**
   Faculty continue to integrate the theme into their individual courses by using the framework and associated teaching tools.

4) **Requiring students to participate in the following joint activities coordinated by SLS (faculty must commit to attending as well):**

ACTIVITY	SEMESTER	DESCRIPTION
Opening Workshop	Every Semester	Brings *all* the students, faculty, and partners in the Linked Courses program together to interact with the thematic framework (e.g., see the Equitable and Sustainable Development Framework here). The workshop gives students the opportunity to engage with and learn from their peers in other courses in the theme and sets the foundation of a common framework to which students and faculty can refer throughout the semester.
Closing Workshop	Every Semester	Students come together to reflect on the experience and offer feedback.
Student Showcase	Fall/Summer	Linked Courses students present their project work at the SLS Student Showcase, along with students from other SLS Affiliated Courses. The showcase includes awards for best projects (given by SLS) and best teachers (nominated by students). In the summer, Linked Courses are encouraged but *not required* to participate in the iGniTe Summer Session Student Showcase.
Liam's Legacy Symposium	Fall/Spring (mid)	Liam's Legacy is an event open to the whole GT community, but the speakers and topic are selected specifically for the Linked Courses theme. This event features regionally and nationally known leaders speaking on the contemporary opportunities and challenges relevant to the Linked Courses theme. See past Liam's Legacy descriptions here.
Opening Field Trip	Summer	In place of a joint project with a community partner, the Summer Program kicks off with a required field trip to the Atlanta BeltLine, led by both partners and faculty.

A note on requiring joint activities: After running Linked Courses programs multiple semesters, we have determined that the joint activities only work when faculty 1) *require* their students to attend, 2) count attendance as part of the students' grades (e.g., participation grade), and 3) attend themselves as well, to demonstrate seriousness and contribute to the activities. SLS coordinates with faculty to schedule these activities in windows that best suit everyone's availability. We also have SLS student workers check students in and provide faculty with a list of the students from their course who attend each activity. SLS recognizes that GT policy stipulates that students cannot be penalized for failure to attend outside-of-class activities ("Student – Faculty Expectations," Teaching at Georgia Tech, 2018-2019). As there are always a few students with conflicts, faculty should have alternative ways for students to meet the requirement for activities they cannot make. Some of the activities are recorded, so watching the video and completing a response worksheet provided by SLS may be one option. SLS is happy to work with faculty to suggest and create alternatives.

GT 1000 & Required Activities: Because it is a single credit course, GT 1000's philosophy is not to require outside activities, so as to manage the time and work entailed by the class. In the instance of the [Equitable and Sustainable Development Summer Course Linkage](), GT 1000 instructors have offered extra credit for students to attend Linked Courses Events.

Benefits of Linked Courses

Faculty benefits:

- Receive a course development grant and support from SLS the semester before teaching to align the course closely to the theme and program requirements
- Partner with a nonprofit, government, community, or business organization doing sustainable communities work in an area related to the Linked Course theme and receive a mini-grant to engage the partner during the course
- Receive logistical and teaching support from SLS during the program semester to strengthen collaborations across courses and deepen thematic connections within the courses
- Develop relationships with faculty in other disciplines who share similar interests
- Receive an invitation to present at the SLS Faculty Showcase hosted at the end of every Spring Semester
- *Optional:* Partner with SLS on Assessment – we are eager to have Assessment Partners from our Linked Courses. Read more about our [Assessment Partners Program here]().

Student benefits:

- Experience working on a project with a community partner (Fall/Spring Semesters)
- Learn and collaborate with students and faculty from a broad array of majors and with community partners
- Gain a broader understanding of what sustainable communities are and how to work with diverse stakeholders to try to create them

Learn More!

We are always excited to meet with faculty to discuss possibilities for engaging in this program. To set up a time to talk, please contact Ruthie Yow, SLS Service Learning and Partnerships Specialist, at [ruth.yow@gatech.edu]().

SLS Linked Courses Summer 2018:
Equitable & Sustainable Development

Partner- and faculty- guided tour of the Atlanta BeltLine, complemented by Opening and Closing Workshops

"This experience [Touring the Westside BeltLine] aligned with the key concept of how infrastructure development can impact different communities in different ways. As a Computer Science major, this relates to how I need to consider not only the software I am developing and who I'm developing it for but also who could be further impacted by it. Processing data can take into account economic impacts, and in some cases environmental impacts can be simulated, but CS doesn't have inherent tools for understanding the social effects of what has been done and what can be done."

- *Student commenting on the impact of the Atlanta BeltLine tour during the Closing Workshop*