

# INTEGRATED CLUSTERS

## Integrated Clusters

To best prepare our students to succeed and thrive in our region and within a 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy, Plymouth State University has organized around seven Integrated Clusters that work across traditional, disciplinary boundaries. We see Integrated Clusters as transformative, holistic learning communities that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and career preparation by valuing exploration and discovery, innovation and entrepreneurship, engaged teaching and learning, and interdisciplinary scholarship. We do this through engaging students in the Four Tools of Clusters, many of which tie directly into our General Education HoME curriculum, including Tackling a Wicked Problem and an Integrated Capstone, and through our open lab experiences which bring together students, faculty, staff, and partners.

Each academic major is affiliated with at least one Cluster, but students and faculty can engage in classes, open labs, and projects across a variety of Clusters.

### What is a Cluster?

An Integrated Cluster is an organization comprised of faculty, staff, and students who come together with the intention to engage in collaborative, multidisciplinary work that transcends or takes advantage of individual disciplines and aligns with the general theme of a Cluster. Each Cluster has an individual identity, as defined in its Mission Statements below; together they embody what it means to be a Panther—to learn and to serve.

### Integrated Cluster Learning Model

The Plymouth State University Integrated Cluster Learning Model engages students in project design and development focused on making a difference in the world from their very first year on campus. Working in interdisciplinary teams on real problems, students develop and practice their communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-regulated learning skills by working in interdisciplinary teams on projects that matter to the world. These Integrated Cluster Learning experiences help students gain the skills and confidence they need to become life-long learners who actively participate in making the world a better place.

### The mission of each Integrated Cluster:

- **Arts & Technologies** focuses on the processes of effective storytelling and making things. We value communication, collaboration, creative problem-solving, and learning for the sake of learning. We study, promote, and practice the intentional use of tools and technologies to enable the creation, sharing, and reception of our work.
- **Education, Democracy & Social Change** is committed to engaging in learning and work that values equity, inclusivity, and social justice. We believe in the power of education to cultivate the critical reflection and engaged citizenship needed to sustain democracy. We advocate for, and collaborate with, children, families, and communities, to promote the well-being of all members of our society.
- **Exploration & Discovery** embraces scholarship, research, and experiential learning in all their forms. Faculty in the sciences, the humanities, and other fields use their expertise to work independently or in collaboration with each other, students, and outside partners to promote learning, advancement of knowledge, problem solving, and service. Together, they explore natural, societal, cultural, educational,

and other questions of their interest. They also engage in academic activities that promote curiosity and inquiry-based learning, and through their scholarship contribute to the betterment of society, locally and beyond. Some of the majors affiliated with this Cluster are biology, meteorology, and mathematics.

- **Health & Human Enrichment** is driven to support, promote, and enhance quality of life for all through education, research, and partnerships. Integrative approaches are applied to project-based education, research, evidence-based practices, and transdisciplinary exploration advancing the art, science, and ethical awareness of human potential. Some of the majors affiliated with this Cluster are nursing, allied health sciences, physical therapy, and mental health counseling.
- **Innovation & Entrepreneurship** exists to serve students, the University, and the community by collaborating across complementary fields of study. By promoting the enterprising habit of mind, we design solutions to the widest range of social, educational, commercial, and environmental problems. We encourage our students to take risks, learn from failures, see opportunity in problems, and act. Some of the majors affiliated with this Cluster are: marketing, finance, educational leadership, and business administration.
- **Justice & Security** examines the many meanings of “justice” and “security” and how these concepts can be applied and implemented in local, regional, national, and international settings. We partner with government agencies and private organizations to engage in service, internships, and collaborative research. Our partners provide students the opportunity to gain real-world experience; and we provide our partners with faculty expertise and students who are eager to learn and make a difference. Majors affiliated with this Cluster are criminal justice and Spanish.
- **Tourism, Environment & Sustainable Societies** merges a diversity of expertise to better understand the impacts of change and development, to prepare for new challenges and opportunities in tourism and economic development, and to produce innovative plans for ensuring sustainability and resiliency through stewardship and entrepreneurship. Through applied, problem-based, and community-engaged learning opportunities, students in this Cluster will become thoroughly prepared to solve these twenty-first century challenges while protecting the vast natural and cultural richness that is the essence of New England. Some of the majors affiliated with this Cluster are: environmental science and policy, sociology, and tourism management and policy.

### Tackling a Wicked Problem

Within their first year, students take the *Tackling a Wicked Problem* course in which they first experience the interdisciplinary, project-based learning approach that represents a Plymouth State University education. By working with a team on a project that addresses some aspect of a challenging societal problem, students begin to develop the communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-directed learning skills that will help them to be successful during their college years and beyond. With a strong grounding in these Habits of Mind, PSU graduates embrace their ability to change the world for the better.

### Integrated Capstone Experience

As a culminating experience, students engage in the design, development, and implementation of a project that allows them to demonstrate their communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-regulated learning skills. Doing so allows them to reflect on and

articulate the value of the entirety of their integrated cluster learning experience.

**Open Labs**

Open labs serve as a tool for Integrated Clusters by providing both a setting and an experiential opportunity for collaboration and real-world problem solving. They can be a physical space like the Maker's Space in Draper & Maynard or project-based learning experiences partnering PSU students with outside businesses and communities. Together, we work to understand and solve twenty-first century challenges.