INTEGRATED CLUSTERS

To meet the evolving needs of the tomorrow-changers, while serving our region and defining our future, 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 open lab experiences. Open labs bring together students, faculty, staff, and partners. Together, we work to understand and solve twenty-first century challenges. 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.

An open lab serves as a tool for Integrated Clusters by providing a setting and experiential opportunity for collaboration and real-world problem solving. Integrated Clusters are also supported by the components of General Education, including Teaching a Wicked Problem and an Integrated Capstone.

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 reflect on the entirety of their integrated learning experience at PSU, now that they are able to connect their acquired knowledge to the outside world. They do this by engaging in a course that requires the skills they’ve accumulated over their time at PSU and applies those skills to concluding project or experience.

The Integrated 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.

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, health education, and athletic training.

• **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 Development** 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.