Disciplines in Dialogue: A Learning Commons Perspective

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Writing from my experience as a professional mentor in a university Learning Commons, I describe the prevalent viewpoint among students that their courses are generally disconnected from one another and that classes outside the major lack meaning. I provide both historical and cognitive contexts for this disjointed view of the disciplines. I then explore a dialogical model for instruction that is consistent with the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, in which alternative disciplines are invited to "speak" to the discipline at hand. Though I advocate this practice for the classroom instructor, I acknowledge the limitations instructors often face in terms of time and the volume of content to be covered, and I render the Learning Commons as a "hub" where varying disciplines can intersect. I relate an example from my work in the Learning Commons with an at-risk student in which such an intersection resulted in enhanced thinking and writing. I argue that no matter the venue, an interdisciplinary approach would not only foster writing with expanded dimension, it would establish connections among the disciplines that would give meaning and purpose to students' educational experience as a whole.