



bu.edu/hub/cross-college-challenge-xcc

BOSTON UNIVERSITY:

BU HUB CROSS-COLLEGE CHALLENGE (XCC)



By: Sandra Deacon Carr, Master Lecturer of Management and Organizations and Faculty Director of BU Hub Curricular Initiatives; Phillip Jacob, Manager of BU Cross-College Challenge

QUICK FACTS

Year founded: **2018**

Project source: **Faculty**

Duration: **Semester-long**

Students per year: **370-400**

Interdisciplinary: **Yes**

Vertical integration: **No**

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Boston University [Cross-College Challenge](#) (XCC) is the signature experience of the [BU Hub](#), the university-wide undergraduate general education program that emphasizes working across disciplines to prepare students for a complex and diverse world.



The XCC program typically offers eight to 10 interdisciplinary, project-based courses per semester, each focused on a different topic and set of challenges. These four-credit elective courses are co-led by two faculty members from different disciplines and are open to juniors and seniors from all of BU's undergraduate schools and colleges. Class size is limited to 25–30 students.

XCC courses engage students in team projects that address a real-world problem or an enduring human question. Student teams work with their faculty as well as a variety of campus and community partners on a substantial, research-based challenge, building their knowledge and skills to fulfill four Hub requirements: creativity/innovation, research/information literacy, teamwork/collaboration and communication.

The program kicks off with an XCC Launch event at the start of each fall and spring semester. The purpose of XCC Launch is to introduce the cohort of XCC students to the full complement of XCC courses being offered, allow them to meet the faculty, and build community within courses and across the program. The semester concludes with the [XCC Showcase](#) — a public event in which all XCC student teams present their projects as part of the undergraduate Experiential Learning Expo. The Spring 2023 Experiential Learning Expo is pictured below.



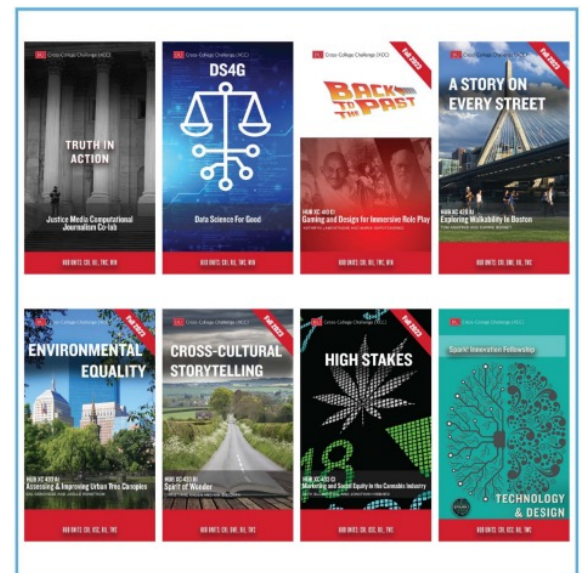
As previously mentioned, XCC offers eight to 10 different courses per semester that are focused on different project areas and community partners. Strategic priority areas for course selection include:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Public Health
- Racial Equity and Social Justice
- Data Sciences
- Boston Community

Student project work culminates in a project deliverable at the end of the semester. These deliverables can include a written report, video, podcast, performance, presentation, etc. Samples of student work are provided in the table below.

Also included is a link to an article in *The Brink*, "[Communicating Science and Research — Through Puppets](#)," which describes the work done in the Thinking Through Puppets and Performing Objects course.

FALL 2023 SECTIONS

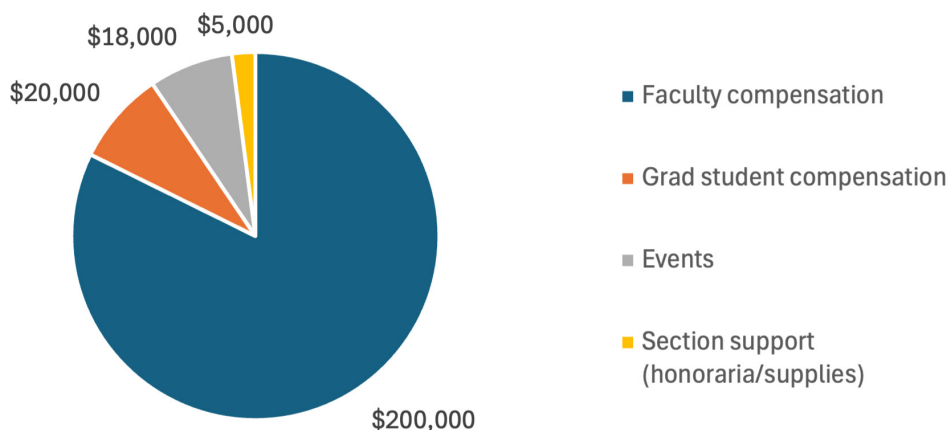


Course title	Examples of student project work
Unheard Voices: Deconstructing the Dominant Narratives by Inclusion	<i>Unheard Voices Podcasts</i>
Thinking Through Puppets and Performing Objects: Using Theatrical Tools to Communicate the Complex, the Abstract, and the Technical	<i>The Root of the Problem</i> <i>The Dehumanization of Puppets</i> <i>Spring '21 Virtual Showcase</i>
City Stories: Boston + One	<i>Palace for the People</i> <i>Public Gardens</i> <i>Via Metropolitana</i>

RESOURCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL

As XCC is the signature experience of the BU Hub general education program, its funding and reporting structure is through the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. Administration of the program includes an XCC manager, faculty director and administrative coordinator.

Cross-College Challenge Expense Estimates FY23



Beyond the administration expenses, faculty compensation represents the most significant portion of the budget. There are two faculty members per course, and each receives compensation for a full course, either as part of their normal teaching load or via an over-base stipend.

In addition, XCC provides program-wide Teaming Support by hiring three to four graduate Teaming Fellows each semester who are supervised by a faculty member with expertise in teamwork and collaboration. These Teaming Fellows collaborate with course faculty to design and deliver the course content on teamwork as well as provide coaching and support to student teams during the semester. Resources include one faculty supervisor stipend and three to four graduate student stipends per semester.

Finally, there is a \$500 budget for each course to support course needs, including guest speakers/honoraria, supplies, student travel, tickets to events, etc.

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Having just completed the sixth year of this innovative program at BU, we have learned several key lessons along the way:

- Faculty creativity and commitment are essential to the success of XCC: Faculty members envision projects, develop courses and engage with students in an impactful, hands-on learning experience. Bringing together faculty with different disciplinary expertise to co-teach a project-based course enables those faculty to model the skills of teamwork, collaboration and communication in real time. Faculty also engage the community partners to create and support the student projects.

- Engagement of community partners is critical to establishing the relevance and significance of the projects: As stakeholders interested in the students' work, these partners provide motivation, guidance and validation for the "real-world impact" of the project outcomes.
- Adaptability and resilience are essential: Over the past five years the needs of the program have continually changed as we not only launched a brand-new program but had to navigate a project-based learning experience as COVID-19 disrupted students, faculty and community partners in unique and challenging ways.
- Since XCC courses fulfill four different Hub requirements and faculty are not necessarily experts in all four areas, it is essential to provide training and support in key areas such as teamwork/collaboration and creativity/innovation.
- Curricular integration via course and Hub "credits" drives student enrollment, but not necessarily student interest or motivation. Therefore, it can be challenging for faculty to get students to fully engage in the pursuit of project-based learning in these courses. Some students find it particularly challenging to adapt to a less-structured, problem-focused approach to learning.

BEST PRACTICES INCLUDE:

- Engaging experts in collaboration to develop curricula and best practices for teamwork that can be used in all of the XCC courses.
- Hiring and training graduate students from the business school as Teaming Fellows to support the student teams directly through classroom engagement, content delivery and consultation as needed.
- Initiating program-wide events to build community and to showcase and celebrate student work.
- Creating a Steering Committee composed of XCC faculty to help oversee the program and provide guidance both to XCC faculty and to the program.
- Providing periodic training sessions for faculty on topics such as co-teaching and best practices in creativity/innovation, teamwork/collaboration, project-based learning and using relevant technology tools.
- Holding regular faculty meetings (at the start, midpoint and end of) each semester where faculty can learn best practices from one another across the program.
- Working with departments across the university to have relevant XCC courses count toward specific majors (e.g., computer science, journalism, business, fine arts, etc.) and minors (e.g., innovation and entrepreneurship, interdisciplinary studies, etc.) in addition to fulfilling general education requirements.

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

As is typical with innovative programs, the legacy systems at the university can create barriers to implementation. One of the goals moving forward is to continue to grow this interdisciplinary program by offering more courses each semester. However, the issue of faculty compensation — how departments allocate faculty to teach courses — remains a challenge because “out of unit” teaching is not something that traditional BU systems and structures readily value or recognize. While the goal is to attract more faculty to teach in XCC as part of their normal “teaching load,” it is very difficult to engage departments in this effort. Departments have their own courses to staff and the compensation provided to their faculty does not typically extend to courses outside of the department. The alternative is to pay over-base faculty compensation, and this obviously limits our growth.

Since XCC courses are electives that fulfill general education requirements, it can be a challenge to ensure that students are motivated to take the course because of the project or content, rather than because it will meet the requirements. Many of our students discover XCC courses when they are looking to fulfill certain general education requirements, so our challenge is to raise the visibility of these course offerings as exciting, topical, project-based courses that require commitment to the teams and projects.

Additionally, the interdisciplinary, team, project-based, co-teaching model for XCC has raised some challenges in terms of grading student work. Faculty from different schools/colleges and students from different majors have different grading paradigms and expectations. The team-based nature of the student projects also contributes to the challenges in grading, as faculty find it challenging to grade teamwork and individual contributions to the team’s work product and process.

Faculty development focused on co-teaching and project-based pedagogy are both challenges and opportunities/priorities for us.

Our goal is to build the Cross-College Challenge into a destination program for students and faculty from across Boston University that serves our community partners by tackling real-world challenges and enduring questions. The priorities include recruiting faculty interested in an interdisciplinary, project-based, co-teaching model; engaging community partners; and developing compelling student projects — all of which should help drive student enrollment based on interest and skillset. When students collaborate on real-world projects that make an impact, they invariably build skills in high demand from employers.

Boston University is a private research university with three campuses in Boston, Massachusetts and 17 schools and colleges. There are more than 18,000 undergraduate students and 18,000 graduate and professional students at BU.