Student-Reflection on Learning before Embarking on an Interdisciplinary Master Programme

Context:
The Master Program in Sustainable Development (MSD) is a two-year program held between Uppsala University (UU) and the Swedish Agricultural University (SLU). Sustainable Development is a popular interdisciplinary subject and the MSD Program attracts many more than the 60 students selected to take the program every year. Each student on the program is unique in many ways – their background, education, culture, and motivation.

The MSD program exposes students to new ideas and broadens their range of knowledge and opportunities, often this is done through the interaction with their classmates as much as the content of the program. CEMUS has 3 courses on the programme totaling 15 credits.

1) Our Natural Resources (UU);
2) Man, Society & the Environment (SLU);
3) Environmental Assessment (UU);
4) Systems Analysis for Sustainable Development (SLU);
5) Interdisciplinary Practice (SLU);
6) Free Choice, often Internship;
7) Thesis (SLU or UU)

This research project aimed at focusing on the first Autumn Semester (Sept-Dec 2015). During the Introduction course, students were given time to reflect on their own background and education, ask what motivates them and what do they want to achieve from the two year program.

Research Questions:
- If there is time for reflection, does this enhance later discussions in and outside classrooms?
- Does this time for reflection allow students to make the most of the educational program?

1st Year – Autumn Semester
Throughout both CEMUS courses, there were many discussions around issues with Sustainable Development, here are specific aspects related to the research:

Introduction Course

Worldviews & Visions

Worldviews & Discourses (CEMUS)

Spring Semester

Worldviews & Visions (CEMUS)

Introduction to Interdisciplinary Science (CEMUS)

Comments on the Reflection Assignment:
- “An unnecessary assignment, I've done so many before and they never make a difference.”
- “Didn't finish yet. But so far helped a lot to reflect. Better standpoint now. Know what I want.”
- “Haven't finished it yet”
- “Have done lots of reflective sort in the past – see no benefit of it at all.”
- “… hard for me to answer an open instructions as these ones. I would prefer more clear instructions.”
- “It is always important to reflect.”

Research from Course Evaluation:
- Did you find the Reflection Exercise and the other elements mentioned above worthwhile for your learning experience this semester? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very worthwhile)
- Do you feel that this understanding improved your role in class discussions? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)
- Do you think that this understanding improved discussions in class as a whole? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)

Autumn Semester Conclusion:
These are the mid-way results of an extended year long study into researching the importance of self-reflection within education. So far, the results indicate that, although not seen as a necessary exercise, discussions within class have been slightly improved having had time to reflect.