

# Learning Communities Initiative

## ***Year One: Learning From Experience***

A. **Project Title:** Your kingdom for a few words?

A Learning Community to Study Web-Based On-Line Assessments and Interventions

B. **Overview:** Tell the world what you're doing. 75 Words or less!

This learning community is investigating a web-based assessment and instruction program for incoming students. First year students typically arrive with varying abilities in areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Academic abilities are assessed during summer residential experiences but today's students often work in the summer to offset college costs, thus precluding participation in summer orientation. Technology provides an option to resolve summer travel issues while providing academic preparation options via the Web.

C. **Community Curator(s):** Who is involved in preparing and writing the case study on behalf of your LC?

Elene Kent, Andy Abbott and Bruce Epps

D. **Learning Community Members, units, roles:** List your community members, their units or disciplines, and roles in the LC. Who are core members and associates (key people involved in the community project other than core members) of your LC? What experiences does each bring to the community and project?

<b>Core Members</b>	<b>Unit/Discipline</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
Elene Kent, Ph.D.	School of Management	Assumed responsibility for continuation of grant, organization, research and meetings; background in educational technologies
Mark Lochstampfor, Ph.D.	Conservatory of Music	Expertise in connection between cognitive science and technology. Also, faculty liaison through UGF to build relationships
Andrew Abbott, Ph.D.	Vice President, Information Technology	Provides expertise in CU platform & capabilities

<b>Associate Members</b>	<b>Unit/Discipline</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
Martha Alcock, Ph.D.	Education (SEPS)	Expertise in education and cognitive science
Bruce Epps	English and Academic Support Services	Archivist/curator for LC; Provides expertise in collection & synthesis of resources in reading and writing content
Elaine Dickinson	Head Reference Librarian	Identification of resources related to research & study; development of information literacy assessment tool
Barbara Helfer	Director, New Media Services	Specialist in implementation of information resources
Jon Stadler, Ph.D.	Math Dept.	Collect & synthesize resources for math
Julia To Dutka, Ed.D.	Associate Provost	Represents assessment & academic interests and build LC relationships
John Soloninka, Ph.D.	Director of Assessment	Expertise in assessment
Laurel Talabere, Ph.D.	School of Nursing	Provides expertise in use of teaching & learning technologies and General Education
Mary Ann Schneider, Ph.D.	Executive Director, Cleveland Center for Lifelong Learning (SEPS)	Provides expertise in use of educational technologies and adult learners
Lydia Block, Ph.D.	Disability Services Consultant	Learning Disabilities Expertise
Students TBA	TBA	Provide student input
Additional Faculty Consultants	TBA	Content expertise in reading and other related learning strategies/skills

**E. Background & Context:** Briefly describe your Learning Community Project and the context within which you undertake it. What do you hope to achieve? What desired ending(s) would you like for the story of your LC and its project? What types of institutional support do you have or would like?

During our first year the LC met regularly and discussed software options in several areas that might possibly be used in development of a web site for assessing new students. The LC was developed through the new Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Capital, and attempted to be broadly inclusive of the university community. Our goal is to lay the foundation for possibly offering a pilot web site in the summer of 2006, depending upon funding for software and infrastructure that may be necessary. We have institutional support through faculty representation, the CELT, Director of Assessment, Academic Support Services, Information Technology, and Library. We believe it will be necessary to have dedicated support from IT for implementation of a possible pilot for web site design, support, training and related technical issues. Support from the Director of Assessment and the First Year Experience program will be vital as well. Financial support for software license fees will be necessary. Possible faculty release time to coordinate the project may be necessary, as well as support from the Institutional Research office.

**F. Description of your early work, planning and preparations.** Describe the preliminary work of the learning community as you prepare for your community project and for attending a Learning Institute. What were the key components in your planning and preparation for your LC (Roles? Methods? Timelines? Coordinating schedules?)? What were key issues and concerns, and, how did you sort them out? What were the key successes and what impact have they had? Are there any vignettes that illustrate these?

Due to a change in leadership, this year's work became stalled. We are now working on development of a timeline and the roles and methods we will use in the coming year to devise a plan that recommends software to pilot and work to gather broad faculty support for the project. In May 2005 we held a mini-retreat that helped us establish our vision and goals for the coming year. At this retreat we clarified our main goals: dissemination of information to the campus community; assessment and remediation of skills of incoming students; intervention to remediate skills; expanding to create broad-based buy-in; development of a successful plan to "assess the assessment."

**G. Community building and project development.** Describe early phases of building your community and developing the project. What key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures do you have and how do you handle them? What did they – or will they - lead to? What successes have you enjoyed to date? Are there any vignettes of potential consequence or impacts that you can share?

We have had some level of success in adoption of Maple TA for math assessment. A key challenge we have observed is getting and building broad faculty support for this initiative

and the LC. A problem we encountered during the first year was the inability of LC members to attend meetings at a convenient time. Our May 2005 retreat has served to re-energize our LC and we are now focused on the task of developing timelines for the various aspects of the project. Hopefully this new energy will translate to increased efficiencies in how we function in the coming year.

H. **Description and reflections on implementation.** Describe how your project work has evolved, including how what you do impacts member learning. Use critical incidents and vignettes to illustrate the action of your community's project. What are key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures, and how do you handle them? What have been your key successes? How have you leveraged these to your advantage?

Our greatest strength at this time is the enthusiasm and renewed interest of the LC members to the project. We believe that with a good PR plan in place for the coming year we will be able to build the faculty support that is needed to pilot this project.

I. **Key Resources:** Who and what are the beneficial people, organizations, materials, websites, and other resources you have utilized? What types of support did you receive from your departments, colleges, administration? Of all resources, which were essential and why were they essential?

Our key resources at this point are the OLN web site and opportunities we have had to network with each other and externally in our various fields. We believe that it is important for our group to take advantage of opportunities to learn more about ways other colleges and universities are using software tools for assessment and remediation so that we can assess their value to our project. For example, two members of the LC attended Educause last year. We hope to visit other local institutions that are taking advantage of technology for teaching and learning in various fields. The math department has been very supportive of our work, and we anticipate greater involvement from the English and education departments in the coming year. Two members of our LC are also members of Capital's First Year Experience Committee, and five of our LC members are also on the Technology in the Curriculum Committee. Capital is currently working on an assessment initiative that has done much to engage the campus community in assessment work. Capital also has an active service learning initiative that's under way. The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching provided seven Faculty Fellows who focused on assessment work this past year. The Liberal Learning Initiative created quite a number of learning communities to investigate various aspects of the Liberal Learning Initiative, resulting in a good measure of global engagement.

J. **Discussion.** As you reflect back on the preliminary stages of your community and its focus and how it has evolved and developed over time, what are critical incidents, key questions and junctures that made a difference in how your community has evolved? What worked and why do you think it worked? What didn't work and why do you think it didn't

work? What are the next steps in the cycle of reflective practice? The next steps may not be predicted and take you in another fruitful direction.

The use of an internal e-mail listserv has been useful to us to share information. Monthly meetings of the LC had mixed results, perhaps due to lack of specific goals/tasks, as well as time constraints and scheduling problems. If we can take special efforts to bring external resources and experts to campus for development events, it may be another way to build faculty support and interest in this project.

**K. What visible bridgework (structural elements, findings, lessons, ideas, beauties, legacies, processes, relationships, etc.) is your learning community leaving, that inspires others to *build their own bridges as they walk on them*?**

We are planning a web site to be launched this coming fall that will provide us with another venue for sharing our experiences and learning with the larger university community.

**You have completed Case Study: 1<sup>st</sup> Year**

**Please send to Andrea Wood [awood@olin.org](mailto:awood@olin.org)**

**By JUNE 1, 2005**

**THANK YOU!**