CENTER FOR TEACHING & LEARNING EXCELLENCE

“Faculty Excellence Equals Student Success”

TL3020 – Learning Communities in Community College

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Learning Worksheets

CTLE is an organizational unit of the
Department of Teaching and Learning Resources

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Worksheet 1: Choosing a Theme—Starting Big Then Going Small

Start with a large issue, for example water, technology, neighborhoods.

1. What are the pressing issues involving this theme?

2. What are you already doing in your class that interfaces with this theme?

3. How can the pressing issues apply to your course Student Learning Outcomes?

4. What ancillary materials could be used to develop this theme, such as video, guest speakers, field trips, service learning, a common book?

5. Have you run into any roadblocks so far? Is there a solution?
Example

1. The theme could be water.
2. Pressing issues concerning water would be access to water (household vs. commercial use in California), access to water as a political issue (in the Middle East), water pollution within your region or the use of bottle or designer waters.
3. You could be discussing water already in your chemistry class (density), math class (unit of volume), and history class (a body of water as a natural boundary). Water could be a topic in almost every class.
4. Look at your student learning outcomes and think of creative ways that water could relate to them.
5. Think of ancillary materials that could apply. Show the movie, *The Day after Tomorrow*, or the documentary *Last Call at the Oasis*. Discuss if the movie or documentary showed a bias.

Choosing a Theme: Starting Small Then Going Big

1. Ask the Emily Lardner* question: “What do students need to know deeply and be able to do in order to respond to unscripted situations in their future career?”

2. What is preventing students from understanding this concept or skill? (The stumbling block or curricular trouble spot.)

3. What individual activities or large project will address this skill or concept?

4. Is there an overall theme that could be used to do this?

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* Used with permission from the authors of: A New Era in Learning-Community Work: Why the Pedagogy of Intentional Integration Matters
http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/July-August%202008/full-new-era.html
5. What ancillary materials could be used to develop this theme, such as video, guest speakers, field trips, service learning, a common book?

6. Have you run into any roadblocks so far? Is there a solution?

Example

1. Students need to be able to use critical thinking skills to evaluate food products and nutrition information so that they can use these skills in situations that we cannot cover in class.

2. Students are prevented from understanding this concept because they are not asked enough critical thinking questions in the classroom, or given enough individual or group assignments that require critical thinking skills.

3. Students could take food products, look at what is written on the labels and written on the products’ websites, and use the nutrition facts learned in the classroom to decide whether they would buy and consume the products themselves.

4. The overall theme could be the use of advertising to sell a product. In this case the product is a food or diet plan described in a book. This theme could be investigated through the lens of the scientific method and other nutrition tools such as health claims and nutritional standards (RDA).
Worksheet 2: The Integrative Assignment

Now that you have a kernel of an idea on what theme your LC will consider, you can start preparing the Integrative Assignment. Whatever assignment format you choose, you will be asking students to use critical thinking skills. Prepare them to use these skills by modeling how to answer critical thinking questions in class.

Individually, then as a pair, consider the following questions:

1. How will the students turn in the integrative assignment? Will it be a research paper, script of a play, journal, power point, written report, portfolio, fill-in-the-blank form, essay, presentation of a tri-fold poster or a mock-up of a building? CCSSE data shows that students who present to a class, in other words teach their classmates, retain information better.

2. Will the integrative assignment be one large project turned in as a series of several smaller projects, (for example: Act 1, then Act 2, etc. of a play) or several independent mini-projects, or simply one end-of-semester project, large or small?

3. Will the integrative project pass the “scissor test”? Could a disinterested party be able to cut the project into sections that pertain to only one discipline?
4. Will the instructors split up the grading in such a way that certain sections are graded by a single instructor? (Keep in mind the “Scissor test.”)

5. Do you have a grading rubric for yourselves and will you make it available to the students? For example, if there were an English/History LC, and the integrated assignment were an essay, the English instructor might grade for grammar/writing mechanics, the history instructor for accuracy of historical facts and the two for development and effectiveness of the student’s argument or premise.
Worksheet 3: Getting on the Same Page†

1. How do you prefer to communicate? (e.g. work/personal e-mail, office/home phone, face-to-face?)

2. How much time can you commit each week, before the semester begins, to plan the LC?

3. What are your meeting preferences during the semester (frequency, location, time of day, over breakfast or lunch)?

† This worksheet was developed at Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, NY, as part of their workbook, Building Learning Communities. Used with permission.
4. What teaching approaches (e.g. lecture, group work, discussion, etc.) do you use? Would you consider adding some group work, some short free-writing, and/or more active student participation?

5. How flexible are you concerning the sequence of course topics? Are you comfortable with a change?

6. What is your attendance policy?

7. How do you assess student learning? (e.g. writing assignments, exams, presentations?)

8. How much reading and writing do you require of your students?

9. What do you see as the specific challenges of working with students in your course?
Worksheet 4: Your Action Plan

Describe your Learning Community. What will you do to make this happen? Who will do what and by when?

1. What help do you need from the administration and who will approach the various levels of administration?

2. What budget will you need for faculty development?
3. How will you recruit team members—faculty, student services support personnel?

4. How will you advertise the LC or LC program?

5. How will you plan for professional development?

6. How will you define success and assess the effectiveness of the LC?