



WASHINGTON CENTER

FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

2009 - 2010 Annual Report

Co-Directors' Note — Reflections on a Year of Change



This past year has been an exciting and challenging time at the Washington Center. Along with everyone else who has a stake in higher education, we are grappling with strategies for implementing low-cost, high-impact reforms aimed at enhancing student learning across a range of contexts.

With national research affirming that learning communities can be an effective intervention strategy for student success, learning communities are now part of a spirited, nationwide conversation about strategies leading to quality learning and degree completion for all students.

More campuses are starting or strengthening learning community work. Long-standing regional learning community networks are being joined by

vibrant, new consortiums: the California Learning Community Consortium is holding its fourth annual curriculum planning gathering in April 2011, and Washington state's new network is taking root.

In addition to working with campuses, leading the National Summer Institute, and supporting regional networks, the Washington Center, more than ever before, is also involved in high-profile educational reform projects at both the state and national level as advisors, evaluators, and technical assistance providers.

Our work in learning communities continues to be grounded in research and practice. Recent studies make clear that three elements are needed for learning communities to be effective: a cohort of students, robust partnerships between academic affairs and student support services, and intentionally-designed integrative learning experiences for students. Over the past year, we have continued and expanded our work in each of these foundational areas.

Cohort design. Evidence is strong that cohorts help students create social relationships and a sense of belonging tied to their educational aspirations. Effective cohort design pays close attention to students' pathways, including critical transition points and known curricular trouble spots. In designing college-preparatory learning communities, the critical importance of including mathematics at the onset of students' college studies is being recognized and acted on.

Partnerships between academic affairs and student support services. Fostering these partnerships is an essential element of action plans that campuses develop at the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities. Increasingly, intrusive advising and early alert systems are part of learning community programs, and on some campuses teaching teams include designated success coaches. Some campuses are also experimenting with counselor-enhanced learning communities for particular student populations.

Washington Center Staff

Emily Lardner
Co-Director

Gillies Malnarich
Co-Director

Rachel Burke
Program Coordinator

Brenda Orzino
Office Assistant

Integrative assignments.

Across the country, faculty from diverse educational settings are designing assignments to develop students' abilities as integrative thinkers. Our College Spark-funded *Reaching College Readiness* project allowed us to work closely with faculty teaching ABE, ESL, developmental and college-level courses at five Washington state community colleges to incubate and document a new integrative assignment design which connects

Co-Directors' Note continued on page 2.

The Washington Center Mission

We are for the academic success of *all* students.

Ultimately, the measures of our success are improvements in students' persistence, achievement, and graduation rates, particularly students who are the first in their families to go to college and those whose families have been historically under-represented in higher education.

We work with educators in two- and four-year post-secondary institutions to develop strategies and practices leading to the success of all students. We support campuses in creating sustainable faculty and professional development programs tied to student learning goals. We organize intensive curriculum planning retreats and consultations, and develop tools, approaches, and strategies for assessing student learning.

We engage in research and produce publications as well as a website which serves as a national resource for learning community practitioners, and share effective practices from leading national, state, and campus-based projects.

Whenever possible, we work in collaboration with other professional groups that share a similar mission.

The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education was established by the Washington State Legislature in 1987 and reaffirmed in 2009 as a statewide resource for two- and four-year higher education institutions.

The Washington Center is based at The Evergreen State College and is one of its four public service centers.

Statewide and National Educational Reform Projects

2010 RPM Schools

Clark College
Everett Community College
Highline Community College
Lower Columbia College
North Seattle Community College
Northwest Indian College
Spokane Falls Community College

I-BEST Developmental Education Schools

Bellingham Technical College
Clover Park Technical College
Grays Harbor College
Highline Community College
Lake Washington Technical College
Lower Columbia College
Shoreline Community College
Tacoma Community College
Walla Walla Community College
Whatcom Community College

Project DEgree Schools

Broward College (FL)
Georgia Perimeter College (GA)
Spokane Falls Community College (WA)

Over the past year, the Washington Center has been part of several initiatives, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, to address a persistent problem in higher education: the dismal graduation rates for students entering college, especially those from families that are historically underserved and underrepresented. We are working with the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) on two initiatives: *Rethinking Pre-College Math* and *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training ((I-BEST) for Developmental Education*. We are also working with the Gateway to College National Network on their *Project DEgree* initiative.

Rethinking Pre-College Math

Forty-five percent of high school graduates who enter Washington's two-year colleges need to take pre-college math courses and, as in other states, relatively few make it through the long sequence to college-level math. And, like other states, the longer the sequence to reach college-level math, the less likely students will stay the course.

The *Rethinking Pre-College Math* (RPM) project aims to improve these numbers by making substantive changes in core educational practices as well as teacher beliefs and behaviors. Washington Center is contributing to this project by working with faculty to implement and learn from classroom assessment techniques and classroom exchanges, as well as collaborating with project lead Bill Moore from SBCTC and John House from the Center for Learning Connections on the design of RPM retreats and institutes.

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)

I-BEST, a program which integrates ESL and ABE classes with entry-level curriculum in professional and technical programs, moves students "further and faster" along their educational pathways compared to a traditional approach where students typically complete ABE and ESL classes *before* beginning their professional and technical studies. I-BEST, now present in all 34 of Washington state's community and technical colleges, has led to substantial improvements in student achievement and workforce certificate completion.

Washington Center is working with project lead Tina Bloomer from the SBCTC on the second phase of the I-BEST initiative, a pilot involving 10 community and technical colleges that are integrating developmental education coursework and professional and technical program curriculum.

Gateway to College's Project DEgree

Project DEgree aims to improve developmental education students' success rates by enrolling first-year students in a learning community that includes developmental reading and writing, math instruction, supplemental tutoring, a college success course, and the services of a dedicated resource specialist who is part of the teaching team. In their second year, students have a completion advisor who supports them in their studies by connecting them with a range of resources, including financial aid.

Washington Center is providing instructional coaching services to three Project Degree institutions during the 2010-2011 academic year.

Co-Directors' Note (continued from page 1)

outcomes for particular courses with college readiness strategies, using the Teaching for Understanding framework from the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero work.

In these challenging times, we need to become even more effective at supporting and enhancing student learning. Focusing on integrative assignments may be the key to scaling the benefits of learning communities across campuses. Integrative assignments are also the key to making deep changes in classroom practice. As we learned in the Washington Center's *National Project on Assessing Learning in Learning Communities*, when faculty have support for thinking through assignments as performances of understanding—time to think through how to stage assignments to maximize the learning opportunities for students, and time to think through why integrative thinking matters for students at all levels—they do wonderful, life-changing work.

Reaching College Readiness: Extending Integrative Learning

In 2009, The Washington Center received a grant from the College Spark Foundation for a statewide pilot to demonstrate and document the effectiveness of integrative assignments as a strategy for increasing retention, persistence, and academic success of students who place into Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and developmental education classes.

From July 2009 through June 2010 five Washington state community colleges participated in this project. Their work developing integrative assignments for cohorts of ABE, ESL, and developmental education students was focused on two key areas of inquiry:

- *Teaching for college readiness:* How can our classes best engage students in preparation for college-level work?
- *Teaching for understanding:* How can we design learning experiences that generate relevant, integrative, and transferable understanding?

Two foundational readings addressed these areas of inquiry — *Redefining College Readiness* (David T. Conley, Educational Policy Improvement Center and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foun-



RCR Retreat — August 2009

ation, March 2007) and *The Teaching For Understanding Guide* (Tina Blythe, Jossey-Bass, Nov. 1997), one of the products of a five-year research program at Harvard University's Project Zero to develop and test a pedagogy of understanding.

This inquiry was guided by Washington Center co-directors, Gillies Malnarich and Eassess-

mily Lardner, along with co-researcher Veronica Boix-Mansilla, from Harvard University School of Education's Project Zero. Krista Sabados provided research support.

Over the course of the year, individuals and teams developed integrative assignments using a heuristic that addressed both college readiness and the teaching for understanding methodology.

This fall we are evaluating the data that has been gathered about this project. Initial feedback from the educators who participated indicate that participation in the project and use of the heuristic has influenced and changed their teaching approaches and proved beneficial for their students.

Once this work is completed, we plan to publish the results of this research. We will also be posting some of the more than 30 integrative assignments that were developed on the Washington Center

Reaching College Readiness Schools

Clark College

Skagit Valley College

Spokane Community College

Spokane Falls Community College

Walla Walla Community College

"I was aware of student attributes that need to be nurtured to help students succeed, but this project helped me make these efforts much more intentional and concrete."

— *Reaching College Readiness instructor*

Online Survey of Students' Experiences in Learning Communities

Colleagues involved in Washington Center's *National Project on Assessing Learning in Learning Communities* asked us to develop an easy-to-administer and easy-to-complete online survey that would give learning community programs benchmark data on students' experiences of learning in learning communities.

In fall 2009, in collaboration with Maureen Pettitt, Director of Institutional Research at Skagit Valley College, we conducted a pilot test of this new survey with 12 two- and four-year institutions from across the country. Over the course of the 2009-2010 academic year, 19

different institutions used the survey.



Students at Skagit Valley College taking the survey in fall 2009.

What is unique about the survey is its focus on questions related to integrative learning and what students actually *do* in learning community classrooms. In the

second version of this online survey, a section comparing students' experiences in learning communities with other classes is also included.

When the results of the 1,221 responses gathered between January and June 2010 were compiled, the most encouraging findings were:

- 90% of the students reported that their ability to take responsibility for their own learning had increased.
- 87% reported that their participation in the learning community program helped to develop their ability to think critically and analytically.

- Over 80% reported that their instructors encouraged them to ask questions and discuss assigned work in class, and made them feel comfortable about participating in class activities.

Besides providing valuable assessment data, practitioners are finding that they can use the data to tailor their faculty development programs.

The online survey is available for campus use again this year. Skagit Valley College will continue to compile individual reports for participating institutions as well as aggregated data for the survey as a whole. Institutions that are interested in participating in the survey can contact the Washington Center.

12th Annual National Summer Institute



In June, the Washington Center hosted its 12th Annual National Summer Institute on Learning Communities (NSILC). Eleven two-year institutions and eleven four-year institutions participated in the institute.

Since 2004, 152 institutions from across the country and abroad have participated in the summer institute. A number of these institutions have attended more than once, to re-tool as their institutional initiatives have changed direction or expanded.

In recent years the institute has become even more intensive, with a renewed focus on meeting the

specific needs of attending institutions. National resource faculty who are experts in the areas institutions identify as most critical, give focused presentations and provide support throughout the week as institutional teams develop two-year action plans to implement on their campuses.

In 2010, institute focuses included improving student success and retention, integrative learning, administrative support for learning communities, current research and high-impact practices, assessment, and faculty development.

The Washington Center is now accepting applications for the 2011 Summer Institute, June 20th to June 24th, at The Evergreen State College.

“This is one of the best conferences I’ve been to, and I’ve been to a lot! Very practical, very focused, very clear with lots of time to produce a product.”

— 2010 Institute participant

Regional Networks

Atlantic Center for Learning Communities

California Learning Communities Consortium

Illinois Learning Communities Consortium

Washington Learning Communities Consortium

The Washington Center website has links to each of these consortiums’ websites.

Professional Development through Regional Networks

When funds for faculty development are limited, regional networks are a cost-effective way to bring together learning community practitioners to learn from each other and share effective practices. Colleagues new to this work are finding valuable expertise close to home while seasoned practitioners are benefiting from in-depth conversations with knowledgeable peers on issues related to teaching, learning, and assessment.

In 2009-2010, Washington state institutions strengthened their

connections, forming the Washington Learning Communities Consortium. California, Illinois, and a consortium of Atlantic states also have active regional networks that host regional learning community events.

This year the Washington Center welcomes long-time national summer institute resource faculty, Ana Torres-Bower, from Cerritos College, as a Washington Center Fellow working to assist individuals and institutions in initiating or strengthening regional networks.

National Resource Center Expands

Washington Center and its website serve as a national resource center for learning community work.

We maintain the National Directory of Learning Communities which can be used to search for institutions that meet a specified criteria — for example, institutions in the Southwest that offer living-learning communities — and find contacts at those institutions.

Another resource the Washington Center hosts is the Learncom listserv, a sounding board for learning community practitioners with over 700 active members.

These resources and others can be found on the Washington Center website. We plan to expand the website and add even more resources in 2011.

Curriculum for the Bioregion

The Curriculum for the Bioregion initiative—with its goal of better preparing undergraduates to live in a world where the complex issues of environmental quality, community health and well-being, environmental justice, and sustainability are paramount—is completing its sixth year this fall. Under the leadership of Jean MacGregor, six hundred faculty members at 32 institutions in the Puget Sound bioregion have participated in project-related activities.

During the past year, two summer field courses on “Restoring Puget Sound” were held, one in Seattle for faculty members from King County campuses and one in Tacoma for faculty from Pierce and Thurston Counties. These courses, taught in the field both on and around Puget Sound, involved 50 faculty members and an equal number of resource faculty—experts drawn from citizen organizations, government agencies, and tribes. UW Tacoma continues to be a key partner in this Puget Sound work

Also this past year, the initiative convened a faculty learning community, “Math and Sustainability” in partnership with the *Math Across the Community College Curriculum* project. Multi-disciplinary faculty teams collaborated on sustainability learning activities involving quantitative reasoning.

Curriculum for the Bioregion recently received a congressionally directed grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) to continue activities in the Puget Sound bioregion. New inter-institutional interdisciplinary faculty learning communities are being formed this fall and plans are underway for workshops throughout Washington state.

Visit us on the web at www.evergreen.edu/washcenter

Institutions Served in 2009-2010

Summer Institute

Bowie State University (MD)
 Colorado State University
 Delaware State University
 Dillard University (LA)
 Edmonds Community College (WA)
 Edward Waters College (FL)
 Halifax Community College (NC)
 Harper College (IL)
 Inter American University of Puerto Rico—San German
 Mesa Community College (AZ)
 Mohawk Valley Community College (NY)
 Mt San Jacinto College (CA)
 Norfolk State University (VA)
 Northern Essex Community College (MA)
 Northern Marianas College (Northern Marianas Commonwealth)
 SUNY Potsdam (NY)
 University of Kentucky
 University of North Carolina-Greensboro
 University of the District of Columbia
 Valencia Community College (FL)
 Westmoreland County Community College (PA)
 Wilbur Wright College (IL)

Washington State Retreats and Workshops

Antioch University
 Bellevue College
 Big Bend Community College
 Cascadia Community College
 Central Washington University
 Clark College
 Clover Park Technical College
 Columbia Basin College
 Edmonds Community College
 Everett Community College
 Green River Community College
 Highline Community College
 Lower Columbia College
 North Seattle Community College
 Olympic College
 Seattle Central Community College
 Shoreline Community College
 Skagit Valley College
 South Puget Sound Community College
 Spokane Community College
 Spokane Falls Community College
 The Evergreen State College
 University of Washington
 Walla Walla Community College
 Washington State University
 Wenatchee Valley College
 Yakima Valley Community College

Online Survey

American University of Paris
 Cerritos College (CA)
 Clark College (WA)
 Duquesne University (PA)
 Holyoke Community College (MA)
 Inver Hills Community College (MN)
 J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (VA)
 King's College (PA)
 Kingsborough Community College (NY)
 Lehigh Carbon Community College (PA)
 Prairie State College (IL)
 Shorter College (GA)
 Skagit Valley College (WA)
 Spartanburg Methodist College (SC)
 Spokane Community College (WA)
 Triton College (IL)
 University of Central Arkansas
 Westminster College (UT)
 Zane State College (OH)

Campus Visits and Presentations

AAC&U/AIS Conference on Integrative Learning
 AAC&U General Education and Assessment Conference
 Bennett College (NC)
 California Learning Communities Consortium Annual Conference
 Cascadia Community College (WA)
 Cerritos College (CA)
 Chemeketa Community College (OR)
 College of the Desert (CA)
 Highline Community College
 Howard Community College (MD)
 Illinois College
 Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
 Merritt College (CA)
 National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Conference
 North Central State (OH)
 North Seattle Community College (WA)
 Northern Illinois University
 Northwest Indian College (WA)
 Pacific NW Association of Institutional Researchers
 Riverside Community College (CA)
 Rogue Community College (OR)
 Seattle Central Community College (WA)
 Spokane Community College (WA)
 State Board for Community and Technical Colleges New Faculty Institute
 Student Retention and Success Conference (OR)
 Triton College (IL)
 University of the District of Columbia
 University of Washington-Bothell
 Walla Walla Community College (WA)
 Zane State College (OH)

Curriculum for the Bioregion

Antioch University Seattle	Olympic College	South Puget Sound Community College
Bellevue College	Pacific Lutheran University	South Seattle Community College
Cascadia Community College	Peninsula College	Tacoma Community College
Centralia College	Pierce College	The Evergreen State College
Cornish College of the Arts	Seattle Central Community College	University of Puget Sound
Edmonds Community College	Seattle Pacific University	University of Washington
Everett Community College	Seattle University	University of Washington-Bothell
Grays Harbor College	Saint Martin's University	University of Washington-Tacoma
Green River Community College	Shoreline Community College	Western Washington University
Highline Community College	Skagit Valley College	Whatcom Community College
North Seattle Community College	South Puget Sound Community College	

Washington Center for Undergraduate Education

Washington Center
The Evergreen State College
2700 Evergreen Pkwy NW
Sem II E-2115
Olympia, WA 98505

Phone: 360.867.6611
Fax: 360.867.6662
E-mail: washcenter@evergreen.edu
Website: www.evergreen.edu/washcenter

Our Work:

- Helping campuses design learning communities as an intervention strategy aimed at improving students' success
- Assisting campuses with curricular and pedagogical strategies to help entering students reach college readiness quickly
- Supporting campuses in creating sustainable faculty and professional development programs tied to student learning goals
- Organizing intensive curriculum planning retreats and consultations
- Developing tools, approaches, and strategies for assessing student learning
- Sharing resources with leading national, state, and campus-based projects

2010-2011 Events

College Readiness Retreat

October 14-15, 2010 Pack Forest • Eatonville, WA

A retreat for Washington state pre-college course faculty (ABE/ESL and Dev Ed) and college-level partners. Co-sponsored with the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_assessment.aspx

Washington State Learning Community Coordinators' Meeting

October 29, 2010 The Evergreen State College • Olympia, WA

An opportunity for learning community practitioners to update each other on campus programs, learn about new research, and network. Co-sponsored with the Washington Learning Communities Consortium.

College Readiness Retreat

February 10-11, 2010 Dumas Bay Centre • Federal Way, WA

A retreat for Washington state pre-college course faculty (ABE/ESL and Dev Ed) and college-level partners. Co-sponsored with the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_assessment.aspx

Curriculum Planning Retreat

April 14-15, 2011 Dumas Bay Centre • Federal Way, WA

A retreat for teaching teams planning to work together in learning communities. Co-sponsored with the Washington Learning Communities Consortium.

National Summer Institute on Learning Communities

June 20-24, 2011 The Evergreen State College • Olympia, WA

An intensive institute for campus teams to develop action plans for learning communities at their institution. Application on website. Application deadline: Dec. 9, 2010. Late applications accepted as space permits.