



INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENTS
THE TROJAN HORSE OF LEARNING COMMUNITY PRACTICE

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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

Twenty-two campuses

- 2 and 4-year; public and independent; geographically diverse; starting and strengthening programs

Exploring the use of learning communities as an intervention strategy


The privilege of talking about the hard parts



ESTABLISHING A SHARED DEFINITION OF LC'S

A common cohort of students who attend two or more classes together

Explicitly designed opportunities for integrative learning



INSTITUTE OVERVIEW: Develop a doable two-year action plan to initiate or strengthen your LC program & provide learning community practitioners with support for doing good work

PLENARY PURPOSE: Focus on integrative learning—the distinctive advantage of learning communities




STRATEGIC WAYS TO THINK ABOUT COHORTS

In terms of an equity agenda

In relation to gatekeeper courses (courses with high D/F/W rates)


In relation to campus needs (i.e. sophomores, STEM majors, undecideds)



A WAY TO THINK ABOUT INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

An out of school necessity that gets schooled out in the “fragmented landscape” of higher education


For example...



CONSIDERING A DEFINITION OF INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

Scan the *Statement on Integrative Learning* in your folder

- What do you find interesting?
- To what extent does this account of integrative learning resonate with your learning community practice and/or campus conversations?




THE LEARNING COMMUNITY ADVANTAGE

"An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates put the pieces together and develop **habits of mind** that prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life.

Integrative learning comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and, understanding issues and positions contextually."



- Designed as part of Washington Center's *Reaching College Readiness* project (2009-10)
- Articles students read
 - "Assessing Student Outcomes in Learning Communities: Two Decades of Studies at a Community College" by Lynn Dunlap and Maureen Pettitt. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College* (2008).
 - "CCSSE Study Shows Engaged Students Move to the Top" by Sandra Gardner. *Hispanic Outlook* (2008).
 - "Sustaining Learning Communities: Moving from Curricular to Educational Reform" by Emily Lardner and Gillies Malnarich. *Perspectives* (2208).




EXAMINING A SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

Imagine this is an assignment you designed last year and you just discovered it in a file:

- what do you *notice* about your assignment?
- what do you *value* about your assignment?
- what are you wondering about?

Discuss your ideas with a few people at your table.



A sampling of questions students asked:

Who came up with the idea of learning communities? Why didn't we think of making them before 1986?

Why do faculty and counselors like the idea of learning communities?


Who decides what two courses get put together?

Why do students become more engaged when taking a learning community?

What do a learning community and interdisciplinary learning have in common?

If learning communities are so good for students, why aren't all of our classes learning communities?

What are some of the challenges with learning communities?



INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENTS AS THE "TROJAN HORSE"

- ⇒ Exemplify principles of learning identified in *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience* (National Research Council)
 - 1st Engaging prior understandings
 - 2nd Essential role of factual knowledge and conceptual frameworks in understanding
 - 3rd The importance of self-monitoring
- ⇒ Favor depth over breadth
- ⇒ Break with the privatization of learning
- ⇒ Connect classroom learning to issues in the world
- ⇒ Invite performances of understanding which become the basis for authentic assessment



DESIGNING INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

With your teams—as a whole or in smaller groups:

- Brainstorm potential integrative assignments for your learning community program
- Give yourselves permission to design assignments that others will have to teach!
- Share a draft with another campus—what do you **notice**, **value** and **wonder** about?



WORK ON THE HARD PARTS

“The hard parts have an annoying characteristic: they do not always get better just through playing the whole game. Real improvement depends on deconstructing the game, singling out the hard parts for special attention, practicing them on the side, developing strategies to deal with them better, and reintegrating them soon into the whole game. Batting practice!”

- David Perkins, *Making Learning Whole*, 2009