

**Learning From Experience: “Developing Portraits of Practice:
CASE RECORDS”**

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

Expanding the Learning Circle (Bluffton College)

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

The Bluffton College Learning Community is working collaboratively to create online learning modules to enrich existing curricula with more diverse ethnic, cross-cultural and geographic perspectives on common topics. These learning modules or “meta-courses” will be incorporated into existing curricula at participating institutions and will engage diverse student populations (one predominately white, one predominately black, and one Vietnamese) in the guided exploration of common resources and discovery projects through threaded discussions and other online activities.

C. Case Recorder(s): Identify the person(s) preparing the case record on behalf of the LC.
Who are you?

Jeff Gingerich, Principal Investigator

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 do each bring to the community and project?*

Community Member Name	Unit/ Title	Role/s in the Community
1. Dr. George Metz	Asst. Professor of Education	Diversity in Education project leader
2. Dr. Dan Wessner	Asst. Professor of History and International Education	Intercultural Communicative Competence project leader
3. Jeff Gingerich	Asst. Professor of Sociology	Antiracism Education project leader & "PI"
4. Dr. Hans Houshower	Director of Technology and Institutional Grants	Institutional coordination and faculty development
5. Dan Fultz	Technology Coordinator	Information Technology specialist
6. Carrie Phillips	Computer Technician /Reference and ILL Asst.	Information Research specialist
7 Dr. Peter Terry	Director of Instructional Technology	Teaching, learning & technology pedagogy
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		

Other comments about LC members and supporters:

Bluffton College students are integrally involved in all aspects of these projects in both leadership and support roles.

E. Background & Context:

Briefly describe your Learning Community Project and the context within which you undertake it. *What do you hope to achieve? How will this contribute to learning at your institution? 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?*

Cross-cultural learning is an integral part of the Bluffton College educational experience. Our learning community seeks to enhance those aspects of the current curriculum by utilizing new technology to extend our discussions about culture, ethnicity, and race beyond our own campus (which is largely culturally homogeneous), as well as to enrich the internal discussions within our campus regarding the important issues of racism today.

Our primary goals are to: 1) enrich and improve undergraduate learning through web-based interactive applications that build cross-cultural competence; 2) experiment with the development of structured learning modules or “meta courses” that can be used effectively and simultaneously at several institutions; 3) extend the learning of the Bluffton College Learning Community by working collaboratively with faculty and students from diverse institutions; 4) contribute to the creative integration of information technology in higher education.

By the end of the project year, we expect to produce three distinct, but inter-related, outcomes: 1) Learning module concentrating on the developing relationship between Bluffton College and Bennett College (North Carolina) featuring educational modules, case studies in education, and the ongoing dialogue between students from these two campuses on issues related to teaching in a diverse setting as well as the challenges to teaching in an urban environment; 2) Learning module involving an inter-cultural and library database collaboration between Bluffton College and An Giang University (Vietnam) featuring scholarly research on sustainable development in Vietnam, the Linguistic Curriculum Writers Project, and ongoing international dialogue; 3) Learning module involving on-campus anti-racism resources and dialogue featuring pedagogical and historical resources that foster a stronger anti-racist environment on campus and facilitate an ongoing dialogue about issues of personal and institutional racism on the Bluffton College campus.

Our projects are supported by the institution primarily because of the program structures that existed prior to receiving the OLN grant. These structures include a required cross-cultural education and experience curriculum, a technology learning center that encourages and funds faculty projects that enhance learning through technology, an anti-racism project (the Damascus Road team) that is designed to effectively address institutional racism at the college; and strong library tech support. The established Technology Learning Circles program provides faculty learning resources and a structure for faculty-student learning communities to collaborate on projects that integrate information technology and learning to enhance the Bluffton curriculum.

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 your 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?*

The project was originally brought to our attention by Hans Houshower, Director of Learning Technology, as an opportunity to enhance and build on existing work. All three projects were already in the planning stage. The Vietnam and North Carolina collaborations had initially begun as college-supported “technology learning circles”, where faculty and students were provided with technology education and support to pursue specific educational outcomes in a sustained manner. The anti-racism project was initially supported by a college-supported release-time grant to enhance an existing course on *Race and Ethnicity* and to begin to develop additional anti-racism resources on campuses. Because of these existing projects, team member roles and timelines were well-defined early in the OLN process.

Beginning with the OLN kickoff event in October, the three faculty project leaders intensified their work with student participants and other team members. Dr. Metz prepared for an exploratory team trip to Bennett College in November. Dr. Wessner and his team began developing a website and sample resources for review and discussion with Dr. Vo Tong Xuan, Rector of An Giang University (Vietnam) during his December visit to Bluffton. Dr. Gingerich continued to explore the relationship between pedagogical strategies and information technology applications in preparation for experimenting with intra-campus dialogue about racism during second semester.

G. Description and learning about your 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? How are you utilizing the Learning Communities information provided by Milt Cox on October 15?*

The fact that the three projects involved in the OLN grant were independent of each other prior to the grant helped to define roles and goals early in the project. Each project was already equipped with explicit goals, learning expectations and anticipated curricular outcomes. This has also led to one of our primary challenges – integrating the three projects together into a cohesive whole. In fact, the Learning Institute was particularly helpful in identifying the relationships of the distinct activities. Van Weigel worked with our group during a breakout session and helped us see that we were developing a comprehensive project with local, regional and international components, linked by an overarching emphasis on transformative socio-economic justice. As an outcome of the January Learning Institute, team members have committed themselves toward more intentional discussion and teamwork around core learning and philosophical themes, as we continue to develop the distinct-yet-related projects. We expect this heightened emphasis on learning as a community to enhance the existing work pedagogically, philosophically, and technologically. We also expect to achieve a broader impact on the college curriculum by developing our activities more intentionally within a unified project.

As we have continued to work with partner institutions toward participating in pilot learning activities this Spring, we have encountered the reality of the “digital divide” in regional and international terms. Issues such as band width, firewalls, and student/faculty access to technology, pose a logistical challenge as we seek to provide learning modules that may not be ‘adaptable’ to other institutions limited by technology. For example, although An Giang University is equipped with many computers, Internet connectivity is limited to a single 56K phone connection currently reserved in one-hour blocks. This situation challenges our expectations for delivering and sharing learning over the Internet, but also provides an exciting opportunity to experiment with available techniques that can support effective communication and learning between international partners. Some of successes to date are the ability to travel to one institution to begin the dialogue and provide a ‘real’ encounter with the affiliated institution, Bennett College. In addition, faculty and students from this institution will be coming to our campus to continue the dialogue and learn more about the learning circles community that is already established, as well as the evolving collaboration among departments and the campus community. The dialogue with Milt Cox from the October discussion prompts us to broaden our campus perspective to dialogue outside our various departments and provide a working model of campus collaboration and integration of ideas that promote our college mission.



This is the end of Part 1.

Take your completed DRAFT of your “*Portraits of Practice: Case Records*” Part 1 to your Learning Institute and send the final version to OLN by February 1, 2003.
