

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

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

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE LEARNING COMMUNITY

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

Utilizing the skills and talents of staff from the Student Services side and faculty from the academic side of the university, this learning community was organized with the following goals.

1. Positively affect students' academic performance in the 1st semester and first year.
2. Promote a strong student attachment to the university.
3. Increase the level of personal development
4. Facilitate positive student-student and student-professor interaction.

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

Denzel E. Benson
Terri L. Capellman

Professor of Sociology
Assistant Director of Residence Services

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?*

Community Member Name	Unit/ Title	Role/s in the Community
1. Denzel E. Benson	Professor of Sociology	Co-Director
2. Terri Capellman	Assistant Director of Residence Services	Co-Director
3. Benjamin Newberry	Professor of Psychology	Faculty Associate
4. Donald Hassler	Professor of English	Faculty Associate
5. Olaf Stackelberg	Professor of Mathematics	Faculty Associate
6. Thomas Emmons	Instructor-Physics	Faculty Associate
7. Carol Steiner	Instructor-Mathematics	Faculty Associate
8. Azfar Mian	Assistant Director of Residence Services	Consultant & Data provider

Other comments about LC members and supporters:

Faculty Associates are directly involved in activities and events designed to accomplish the goals of this learning community. Azfar Mian provides data support and serves as a consultant with the web portal, an electronic means to communicate, both synchronously and asynchronously with the FYE student community.

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?*

The goals of our community are identified in "B" above. All of these goals are directly or indirectly related to increasing the level and scope of student learning at KSU either by affecting students directly or the faculty and staff who affect them or both. It is our hope and desire that we will achieve our goals and that this community will be maintained by the university in future years. We enjoy strong institutional support and, assuming we can show positive outcomes with this learning community, hope that this continues for future first year students.

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?*

KEY COMPONENTS: Mary Lou Holly, Director of the Faculty Professional Development Center at Kent State University played a key role in the instigation of the community and identifying and recruiting leaders. Once these leaders were chosen, meetings were held to determine goals, directions, timelines, etc. As is typical in the academic world, it was not easy to coordinate the schedules of everyone but with a high level of motivation this was achieved.

KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS: A central task that was identified at the outset was the recruitment of key faculty to serve as Faculty Associates. The co-directors decided that it would be important to recruit faculty who were involved with the primary subject areas that first year students encounter—English, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology, and Sociology. As much as possible, we wanted to recruit people who also had experience in teaching first year students in these areas. With the research orientation of the university we knew it might be difficult to recruit people with these combinations of characteristics. In some instances this proved to be correct. Utilizing the assistance of some department chairs who were favorable to the project and engaging faculty in discussions about the possible educational benefits of the community, we were successful in addressing this issue and concern.

KEY SUCCESSES: We were able to recruit a very experienced and committed group of Faculty Associates. We have been very successful in getting cooperation from both the student services and academic sides of the university for the project. We don't yet have "hard" data that speak to our degree of success but, based on anecdotal information, we believe we are accomplishing our goals. With that said, students are becoming accustomed to a culture with strong faculty interaction and involvement thus affecting the way they identify and view faculty. Students are soliciting information regarding the next meeting time and demonstrate an interest in scheduling a course taught by a faculty associate (s).

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?*

We have described some of the initial steps that were taken to create this learning community in point "F" above. As noted above, obtaining key faculty and the many hours spent coordinating the schedules of the various people and offices involved in the community were significant challenges in the early phases of building the community. A significant event was a "kick-off" meeting of the community. Due to the size of the community and the numerous conflicts with other scheduled events, an initial meeting was cancelled. Subsequently, we re-scheduled this meeting in a different location and time with modest success with respect to attendance. A significant aspect of this community involves using digital technology to keep students informed about community events. Coming to learn that many students do not use or check their university e-mail accounts meant that many students did not know about many of the community events nor did they participate in the chat rooms located in the web portal for the community held by faculty associates. We have had many "successes" involving direct student-faculty contact and some events. For example with the strong support from residence services, the faculty associates served "midnight breakfast" to the community in one of the dining halls during final examination week. The turnout was larger than expected with many students commenting favorably about the activity and the contact with faculty. We are utilizing some of the information obtained on October 15 to help guide us in choosing activities, sorting through ideas that may aid the community and, in general, help us stay focused on what is most beneficial to the community.

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This is the end of Part 1.