

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

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

Ohio University Scholarly Communities of Practice in Education

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

This is a long-term capacity-building project through which we hope to build campus-wide awareness of the benefits of community-based collaboration, toward the end of FLCs becoming an integral feature of Ohio University’s faculty culture. As we carry out this project, our goals require (a) creating conditions under which change leadership can thrive and (b) ensuring executive involvement and investment in the process. Thus we have chosen nine faculty to become a learning community on learning communities in order to work with us in designing and implementing FLCs over the next year to seed a campus culture of faculty collaboration.

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

Karin Sandell, Director, Center for Teaching Excellence, Co-facilitator of SCOPE Ohio FLC.

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. Ann Kovalchick	Director, Center for Innovations in Technology for Learning	Co-facilitator of SCOPE FLC; leader of SCOPE Ohio team
2. Karin Sandell	Director, Center for Teaching Excellence	Co-facilitator of SCOPE FLC
3. David Descutner	Interim Dean, University College	Member SCOPE Ohio team
4. Sherrie Gradin	Director, Center for Writing Excellence	Member SCOPE Ohio team
5. Merle Graybill	Director, Center for Community Service	Member SCOPE Ohio team
6. Susan Sarnoff	Professor of Social Work	Member SCOPE Ohio team
7 Lonnie Welch	Professor of Computer Science	Member SCOPE Ohio team
8. Bill Willan	Assistant VP Regional Higher Education	Member SCOPE Ohio team

Other comments about LC members and supporters:

Our SCOPE team has functioned as a coalition of like-minded individuals devoted to the spread of community (and thus our focus on building capacity). As a result of our work together, we have nine faculty members from across three of Ohio University's six campuses who will form a FLC, facilitated by members of the SCOPE Ohio team, who will work together and with the team in taking the project to the next level. Although philosophically committed to the idea of community for our campus culture, our initial coming together was instrumental, to obtain the necessary funding to enable development of FLCs among our faculty. Indeed, our group contains mostly administrators, a group strategically connected because of their key role in supporting the initial development and (ideally) ultimate institutionalization of FLCs at Ohio University. As we move into this next phase, a number of possibilities emerge regarding the nature of the FLC. Will members of the SCOPE team become part of the SCOPE FLC? Will they remain a dedicated group of enablers who most of all want to make FLCs available to faculty and an influence on the institution? And is either direction more important than the other to the ultimate success of this project? Finally, have members of the team gained enough from their own experiences to facilitate the development of an FLC among the nine faculty members who are the future of this project? As the plan for the FLCs is not to plan, but to trust the process to produce ideas organically, we expect that responses to these questions will emerge as we continue working together.

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?*

Ohio University's campus culture arises in its individual schools and departments and thus more accurately is many individual cultures loosely bound together by place and mission. Opportunities for cross-campus collaboration have remained few--although the highly positive response to these early initiatives has demonstrated that our faculty value collaboration. For any number of reasons, we have simply not developed a campus culture that facilitates collaboration or that regards collaboration as the logical and necessary way to conduct our work. We have rather operated in our individual silos, convinced that the uniqueness of our missions, fields, faculty and students precludes mutuality in perspectives, goals, philosophies and outcomes. Successful development of nine FLCs in the 2003-4 academic year, which remains our goal through the OLN project, will demonstrate to our institution the value of collective decision-making for the good of the whole. We hope that, over time, these initial efforts will result in a cadre of change agents based on shared experience and a shared institutional history. In this way, faculty governance can be more productive and responsive, curriculum change can be less stressful and more imaginative, and student learning will be defined and measured in ways that support a pluralistic perspective on education.

We hope that each of the nine faculty members taking part in our SCOPE FCL will both gain from the development of community as they work together from January to June and will bring their positive experiences back to their colleagues. Those experiences will, we hope, lead them in the successful facilitation of their own FLCs next year, tackling a series of topics that emerge organically from the intersection of their own and their colleagues' needs and interests. In our best case scenario, future iterations of the FLCs emerge equally organically and the expected collegial approach to a challenge or opportunity will be the formation of an FLC. Further, the kinds of collaborative strategies and processes embodied in FLCs will be reflected in faculty governance and development throughout the institution.

Ohio University has already committed to this project through the investment of time and funding from the Provost. Our concerns are two fold—first, sustaining the effort past the first year, especially in terms of finding continuing funding. And second, maintaining the energy and enthusiasm of SCOPE team members, a task that already has proved difficult. (And which will be explored further, below.)

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?*

Our FLC project began as a germ of an idea that surfaced in a lunch time conversation among a subset of our SCOPE team that was brainstorming about possible ways to engage other faculty in some sort of continuing group devoted to sharing their thoughts, experiences and questions about teaching and learning. This small group of faculty and administrators had been brought together through a unique program that supported such an activity for a year and they were interested in finding ways of expanding their experiences, both for themselves and for other faculty.

Fortuitously, the OLN call for proposals occurred at this same time, and the SCOPE team was begun. The initial focus for the small working group was fairly diffuse, so attention quickly turned to the case study required as part of the OLN project. As the small group started developing the case, the members began to invite other persons to participate in the project, thinking about each new participant's relative abilities to add to the case. The group, rapidly evolving into what has become the SCOPE team (and which for purposes of this narrative will henceforth be referred to as such), moved back and forth between focusing on the case and focusing on the proposal itself, with a good deal of confusion about each. This activity took place over the previous summer and, for a time, included rather extensive weekly meetings where the germ of an idea fought to become fully realized.

The moment when it appeared that we were on a productive path was the meeting at which we decided to focus on capacity building; that is, at the moment that we decided not to attempt to build a FLC on incorporating active learning in large lecture courses (an administratively derived issue of importance), but to focus on teaching interested faculty how to form FLCs that reflected their own interests and issues. That moved us past two different axes of difficulty. The first prolonged the discussion regarding whether the case study should be an exemplum of the best practice or a model of working through potential solutions. We revisited this "show where to go vs. show how to get there" discussion on several occasions. That disagreement came the closest to derailing the project, particularly when we moved too quickly in writing the case to choosing service learning as the solution to our faux-professor's teaching difficulties.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the project was explaining it to the varied participants, as they joined the team, each of whom had different amounts of knowledge about FLCs, technology, and the various components of the program, and were wisely cautious about the "buy in" until they understood the project completely. Conversely, with so many educators and education-oriented folks from disparate disciplines and regions, representing faculty, administration, and staff, we proved the old group work concept that the whole added up to more than the sum of its parts--we've all been pleasantly surprised with the results. We're like that analogy about making sausage--it's not pleasant to watch it being made, but the result can be heavenly (with apologies to the vegans among us).

We encountered the usual problems with finding times when enough of us could meet to

conclude the work of the project. We created a Web site and attempted to carry out some of the work online, but weren't as successful at carrying that out as we could have been. This may have been a function of attempting to work in the summer when schedules shift and team members moved in and out of town (our online work this fall has been smooth and productive, in contrast). The summer period, as described above, was also the initial stage of our working together and we did so with little social interaction, outside of a group lunch or two. Given what we have learned from Milt Cox about successful implementation of FLCs, we will begin our SCOPE FLC with a social, team-building event as we learned from our own experience that failure to spend time building community may have been one of the reasons we failed to become a FLC and were unable to gain the time commitment from team members necessary to fully realize our potential as a collaborative group.

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?*

Our major challenge throughout was the hard work of determining what we thought we wanted to do. Being dialogic and dialectical can be very tough work. The journey from our initial very informal idea to the expanded much more explicit one continually tested everybody's preconceived ideas of what "felt" right. Also, as we proceeded we continually added new personalities and thus ideas to the mix. This was the "high five" in our work together, though. When we would say, "oh, wouldn't so and so be great to work with," we began to realize that we had some great bedrock places and folk from which to build. Going through the process of narrowing our focus to deliver the case study showed us what was at stake in the process and will prove invaluable when advising FLC faculty leaders through the SCOPE FLC.

Past the point of developing the case and selecting capacity-building as our focus, a second axis of difficulty concerned whether inclusivity or exclusivity presented the best chance of success for the SCOPE FLC. This axis could be seen in our opinions regarding the size of the planned SCOPE FLC. Suggestions ranged from around six carefully selected leaders with proven records to twelve volunteers. Should we invite persons we felt would be successful FLC facilitators to take part in the SCOPE FLC or should we send a call for proposals out to the campus and see who might be interested? Ultimately, we did both, inviting applications from a list of individuals who had worked with us in the past and sending out a general call for proposals as well. We offered information sessions to faculty who were interested, explaining more about the program and encouraging their proposals. We talked to chairs/directors/deans, encouraging them to in turn to encourage applications and seeking their support for the program and for any of their faculty who subsequently took part in it. Our discussions became complicated as we feared a lack of initial response to our CFP, having only a pair of proposals in hand one week before the deadline.

One week later, we were hurriedly completing our plans for reviewing proposals and making

decisions, having received 11, when seeking eight good proposals. As with any process, the hardest part was deciding which proposals to eliminate, and even there we ended up being more inclusive and finding additional funding through Regional Higher Education, to add a ninth person to the group. The enthusiasm of the nine individuals we have chosen and the depth of their proposals for being part of the SCOPE FLC and for subsequently developing their own FLCs next year has been our great success—and it's noteworthy that up until a week before the deadline, we were unaware of the extent of our success.

Our biggest challenge, past the narrowing and specifying of our focus, has been the limited and qualified involvement of some members of the SCOPE team. Specifically, when members do not weigh in on collective decisions, it is not clear if the non-response is indifference, agreement to the proposed issues, or failure to receive the message. In practical terms, this can cause confusion and communication overload (i.e. having to say the same thing several times to different people, which is usually interpreted in slightly different ways). Non-response challenges the very notion of our SCOPE team as a collaborative body, as we assume the core of a collective is the decision making. Further, this is how people become marginalized, by slowly becoming increasingly silent, invisible. For example, not all of the conveners provided selection rankings on the CLR applicants, a very important decision, a sort of peer review in which we are assessing others, and which must be conducted in a committed way.

For the future, our concern is whether our team members will be able to commit sufficient time to this project. People differ in their abilities to manage their time and that may result in differing levels of participation, as well. More importantly for the success of our own SCOPE team working collaboratively and being able to work productively in mentoring and facilitating our future FLC leaders in the SCOPE FLC, team members need to perceive this initiative as a priority such that x number of hours or minutes per week are deliberately devoted to reading, reflecting on meetings, conversations, documents, and this case study.

The best example of this to date has been that there has been only a single type of decision that has resulted in 100% participation—that is, inquiries to members to schedule and attend a meeting. This is a fairly binary yes - no request that requires little reflection. Having noted that, overall participation in our team meetings has been rather good, though not always 100 %; nonetheless, most folks make it most of the time and if you consider ALL the meetings we've had since April 02, that's not bad. As noted earlier, a key question is whether we can use asynchronous technologies to capture the interest and participation when schedules/conflicts preclude face-to-face contact and continue to build our own community. It is through reflection and study of our own community's efforts and actions that we build a storehouse of knowledge and experiences to share with our SCOPE FLC cohort.

--

.....

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.

.....