

Learning from Experience: Developing Portraits of Practice Part I

A. Learning Community (LC) Title

Human Geography ReVisioning Learning Community at The University of Toledo (HGR)

B. Community Curator(s). Who has prepared Part I of this Portrait on behalf of your LC? What date was it completed?

Gale Mentzer, project evaluator completed this February 25, 2008

C. Abstract (75 Words or less) *if it has changed*

No change.

D. Learning Community Members, Units, Roles. List your community members, their units or disciplines and roles, *if they have changed*. Who has been added, deleted?

| Core members | Unit/Discipline | Contributions |
|----------------|--|---|
| Karen Rhoda | Administrative Director, UT eLearning and Academic Support | Facilitates all meetings. |
| Dan Hammel | Professor of Geography | Supervising content portion of the course improvements. |
| Grant Wilson | Graduate student, Department of Geography | Researches, designs and implements course improvements. |
| Gale Mentzer | Evaluator | Provides formative evaluation for course effectiveness. |
| Phoebe Ballard | Instructional Designer | Provides web-based course design content. |

| Associate Members | Unit/Discipline | Contributions |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Bernard Bopp | Director, UT Center for Teaching Excellence | Provides advice for effective online teaching strategies. |
| Mary Beth Schlemper | Professor, Geography | Provides content classroom application advice. |

E. Background & Context. Briefly describe your Learning Community Project and the context within which you undertake it. What do you intend to achieve? What technologies are you using and how? What desired ending(s) would you like for the story of your LC and its project? What types of institutional support do you have? What types of support would you like?

Some HGR LC members represent best practices in teaching, some in distance learning and technology, and some in geography education. This group has come together to enhance our Human Geography course by infusing hands-on activities that utilize simulated GIS technology. The LC has the full support of the University through its Division of eLearning and Academic Support. Our intended outcome or "ending" would be that our students will gain the opportunity to work with technology that is the core of a rapidly expanding sector of our economy and therefore, a stronger mastery of Human Geography, higher course persistence rates in the course, and a greater interest in geography as a career path. In addition, we hope that the working relationships that have developed within the LC will continue beyond the scope of this project.

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 Region's Learning Institute (March 14, 2008). 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 impacts have they had? Are there any vignettes that illustrate these?

Early planning revolved around reviewing the original plan and determining a timeline for both meetings and project progress. One core

member Dan Hammel was called away to Washington, DC to work for the National Science Foundation. However, he attended all meetings via conference calls and continued to work closely with Grant Wilson in the development of course improvements. Early meetings focused on applying sound instructional theory and design to the web-assisted portions of the course. Another challenge that was addressed during this time was determining the best way to get treatment/control group data. During November and December, Grant Wilson and Phoebe Ballard spent most of their time readying the course for its spring semester "premiere". Currently the course, along with our improvements, is being implemented. Future meetings will examine formative evaluation collected from students completing the web-based activities.

G. Community Building and Project Development. Describe early phases of building your community and developing your collaborative project. What key challenges and problems do you face 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? What resources are you using to support community building and how are they making a difference?

The early phase began with the LC first becoming familiar with each other. One challenge faced early on was the loss of the original instructional designer (took a new position elsewhere). However, his replacement, Phoebe Ballard, has done a fine job of getting the project back on track.

Another challenge stemmed from the realization that the use of GIS technology as originally planned was not technologically feasible. However, two equally effective solutions were designed and are being implemented it's in place: 1) A GIS simulation was developed using genuine ESRI data and Adobe Flash. This learning object provides students with a hands-on introduction to both the ArcGIS interface and geospatial principles, while eliminating the need for students to invest the time and expense that is typically needed in order to successfully master this traditionally complex and robust technology. 2) Google Maps, a free web-mapping platform, is now utilized in a hands-on activity related to globalization. The learning curve associated with this software should be equally minute, and should provide students with a fun, focused and highly accessible way in which to connect geospatial principles and technologies with real-world concerns and interests. In spite of this challenge, it is anticipated that both curricular solutions will prove to be more focused, learning-centered and intrinsically motivating than those envisioned in the original construct, thus resulting in more measurable and successful student learning outcomes at the project's conclusion.

H. **Planning Your Assessment Strategies.** How will you evaluate your work/successes? How will you assess member learning, (including technology learning)? your community's growth over the year? student learning or change connected with your project? Both formative (this Portrait is part of this) and summative methods should be used.

Project success will be measured through student assessment and student feedback. Students during spring semester have completed a pretest and will be administered a posttest. This will be compared with a control group from fall semester.

Member learning will be measured through the completion of a short survey at the conclusion of the project. In addition, the evaluator has been taking notes at each LC gathering. The resulting diary of meeting minutes will be assessed using qualitative methods in order to measure changes in group interaction and in topics of discussion.

This is the end of Part I
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[Submit Part I to nwlccenter@bgsu.edu]
