

## *Learning from Experience: Developing Portraits of Practice Part II*

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

Gale Mentzer (project evaluator); May 7, 2008

J. **Key Resources.** Who and what are the beneficial people, organizations, materials, websites, and other resources you have utilized? What help/support did you get from instructional designers, IT staff and other tech support personnel? What types of support did you receive from departments, colleges, administration? Of all resources, which were essential and why were they essential?

Our key, essential resources were members of our LC. Dan Hammel and Grant Wilson provided content expertise (geography); Phoebe Ballard, our instructional designer, provided the faculty support to produce the “look” that Dan Hammel wanted for this course and a student-friendly format to present the instruction. Todd Rains assisted with the digital design aspects of the instructional design. Karen Rhoda provided administrative support which allowed the Geography course to be reinvented. Her office, eLearning and Academic Support, provided technical guidance and expertise throughout the course of the project and Karen herself provided LC leadership—an essential element to staying on pace and completing our objectives.

K. **Your Assessment Strategies.** How did you evaluate your work/successes? How did you assess member learning, (including technology learning)? your community’s growth over the year? student learning or change connected with your project?

What have you observed or concluded at this point with respect to member learning, your community's growth, and student learning?

The success of the ReVisioning of the Geography course was measured using an assessment of student content mastery. Baseline data was collected Fall 2007 (control group) and was compared with tests taken at the conclusion of Spring 2008. Two content assessments were used to compare outcomes. Student learning was measured three times during the semester. The first test included content that was addressed by the project improvements. A comparison of

student mean scores on this test (t test) was conducted. Because sample sizes were different (Fall n = 100 and Spring n = 84) an F test for equal variances was performed. Results showed variances to be equal (F = 0.85). The t test showed the Spring students to be significantly statistically higher on the first test (t = 3.26; p < 0.00, df = 182). Mean scores on this test were 29 for the Fall group and 32 for the Spring group. Next an overall grade was compared (total of all three tests given during the semester). Students who did not complete all three tests were eliminated from this comparison. Resulting sample sizes were Fall n = 90 and Spring n = 73. Mean overall scores were 98.5 for the Fall group and 103 for the Spring group. After equal variances were again verified (F = 0.99) the t test again showed the Spring group to score statistically significantly higher over the course of the semester (t = 1.65; p = 0.05; df = 161). Because other aspects of the course remained the same, we can speculate that the improvements to the course as a result of this project were the cause of the increased student content mastery.

LC membership learning was assessed through a qualitative analysis of members' reflective comments. In general, all members noted the project was not as simple as originally envisioned and yet our goal was indeed accomplished. In addition to redesigning the course to provide more practical, hands-on, and inquiry-based instruction, members also learned about other aspects of teaching especially as applied to teaching online courses and effectuating student learning. For example, Bernie Bopp, director of the University of Toledo Center for Teaching and Learning, met with the LC early on to share teaching and instruction best practices. Mark Fink, former director for eLearning Faculty Support, provided best practices and learning theories specific to online courses. Many of these best practices, including Chickering & Gamson's 7 Principles of Good Practice were incorporated into our reVisioned course. In all, each member took something unique away from the experience by filling a gap in their own areas of expertise.

**L. What Others Know About What You've Done.** Beyond your community members, who else is vested in what you're doing? How did you communicate and update these stakeholders on your efforts and successes? What questions do your colleagues have? What have you told your students about your learning community?

The Geography Department and the College of Arts & Sciences have interest in the outcome of this project. First, the Geography Department has evidence of a unique way to introduce more practical aspects of geography to introductory level students. It is our hope that by providing a more positive learning experience, more students will consider Geography as their major area of study. Members of the LC who are in the Geography Department have shared their experiences during departmental meetings. The College now has an example of what might be done in other content areas—areas in which students often struggle at the entry level (e.g., chemistry and mathematics). In spring 2009, we are scheduled for a

luncheon presentation sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Learning to talk particularly about how we have used technology to design exercises that engage students in learning activities.

M. **Dissemination.** What visible bridgework -- structural elements, findings, lessons, ideas, beauties, legacies, processes, relationships, etc -- is your learning community leaving, that inspires others to *build their own bridges as they walk on them*? What digital resources have you developed that you will place into the E-Learning Athenaeum of Ohio? What might members offer, such as informal "brown bag" lunches, research, written articles, and presentations about your work? What is important to tell others "not to do"?

We expect to showcase the use of technology in this course as a spring board to motivate other faculty/departments to revision other courses. As previously mentioned, we will be presenting the redesigned elements of this course and its hands-on activities that utilize Geographic Information Systems in a Center for Teaching and Learning luncheon. Too, dialogue among faculty at an eLearning and Academic Support brown bag lunch is expected to interest others in producing similar results in their courses. In fact, the University's strategic initiatives call for reengineering our undergraduate experience. One of the ways this will occur is for faculty to work with instructional designers. Course modules will be created so faculty can use the ones needed to produce customized student learning experiences that better prepare them for the work arena.

N. **20/20 Hindsight.** If you were to start over again, what would you do differently and why? What key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures, would you handle differently? To what degree would you change your goals? What additional successes would you enjoy? What worked - or didn't work -- and why?

In hindsight, we would have more carefully researched the use of GPS as an instructional tool prior to submitting our proposal. We spent quite a bit of time spinning wheels during the first few months of this project which could have been put to better use had we realized that the simulated GPS system we developed was a much better fit for this introductory course. In the long run, however, we met our goals and our time schedule and now have a well-designed and effective course.

O. **What's Next?** Will your community continue? Formally? Informally? What could be next in another cycle of reflective practice? The next steps may not be totally predictable, yet they may take you in another fruitful direction that builds upon your community's growth and knowledge.

While we have no plans to meet formally, the relationships developed through participating in this LC will last and we will be producing at least two presentations based on the outcomes of this LC. All members now have several experts and resources to add to their networks and because of the amiable experience we will not hesitate to call upon one another when advice or help is needed.

**This is the end of Part II**  
*Learning from Experience: Developing Portraits of Practice*  
[Submit Part II to [nwlccenter@bgsu.edu](mailto:nwlccenter@bgsu.edu)]