

Learning Communities Initiative

Year One: Learning From Experience

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

Prior Learning Assessment via Electronic Portfolio Learning Community
Lorain County Community College

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

We explored the world of prior learning assessment, electronic portfolio, emotional intelligence and more. Our goals: meet needs of students and employers for clear documentation of acquired knowledge and skills; develop a model course (including a template for syllabi); and develop products and protocols, (based on the concept of emotional intelligence) that will enable students to proactively prepare to best use their learning, abilities and attributes in their personal and professional lives.

C. **Community Curator(s):** Who is involved in preparing and writing the case study on behalf of your LC?

LC Facilitator, Dorinda Smith, dsmith@lorainccc.edu

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?

Core members	Unit/Discipline	Contributions
Dorinda Smith, Facilitator	Social Sciences and Human Services Division, Coordinator of the Public Administration Degree Program, Political Science and Urban Studies disciplines	Faculty member, consultant...Facilitates and coordinates all LC-related activities, meetings and study sessions. Arranges for all documentation of our work.

Kathryn McNary, Vice Facilitator	Programs for Student Success Division, Coordinator of Tutoring and Testing Center Functions	Completed some bachelor-level work through portfolio prior learning assessment... Assists Facilitator; researched for LC, assisted in identifying resources; has developed a PLA portfolio
Marcie Rechner, Cleveland State University	Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, instructor of portfolio development prior learning experience course	Worked with LC to share her portfolio development course, resources and experiences, description, website, etc. Researched, provided resources, attended OLN summer and winter Institutes
Generosa Lopez-Molina	Programs for Student Success Division, Academic Division Director	Resource developer, Identified commercial templates to consider and arranged teleconferences to help us collect information. Arranged for technology needed for some meetings.
Pat Schroll	Allied Health and Nursing Faculty	Faculty director, resource developer, prior LC experience...Member and analyst of our study materials and our evaluation of materials and resources.
Mike Zellers	Business Faculty	Faculty, resource developer, technology expert, prior LC experience...Member and analyst of our study materials and our evaluation of materials and resources.
Marsha Jones	Coordinator of Work-Based Programs	Career Services background...our liaison with those who are seeking employment and/or upgrading their career prospects by developing E-Portfolio

Current Active Associate Members	Unit/Disciplined	Contributions
John McGrogan	Consultant, EMH Health Systems	Training and consulted with our LC on Emotional Intelligence
Sheldon McMahan	Webmaster at Lorain County Community College	Assisted with the website information and helped us plan for it
Tom Bedocs	Institutional Systems and Services, Lorain County Community College	Connected our LC members with videoconferences
Steve Mitchell	University Partnership Operations and Continuous Improvement Coordinator,	Assisted us with information regarding E Portfolio uses and design
Joseph Querin	Computer Resource Lorain County Community College	Assisted with website and logo refinement

	Technician, Web Portal,	
Mark Bakst	Television Producer/ Director, Lorain County Community College	Assisted in development, narrated and produced our LC multi-media product
Patty Kushner	Staff Associate, Social Sciences and Human Services Division	Made our life so much better by arranging rooms, food, technology and other important resources.

E. **Background & Context:** Briefly describe your Learning Community Project and the context within which you undertake it. What do you hope to achieve? 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?

Lorain has undertaken the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) through a committed design team focused on improving the quality of education, assessment, and retention of students. Part of the AQIP effort has produced a comprehensive course assessment process (CAR), program assessment (PAR), and a college assessment record (CARD). Prior learning has not been part of the work to date. Because our facilitator is part of the AQIP design team, and because PLA has not been included, our LC was established to determine feasibility of PLA in our institution. It was here that we began our work.

As we focused on the *Seven Principles of Good Practice* (Chickering and Gamson, 1987), we sought alternatives to assist individuals who come to Lorain, and to CSU, who bring rich experiences from work, education and/or training, volunteer experiences, military service and other similar venues. Our commitment has been to develop pathways that offer students alternatives to traditional course completion in some subject areas. Our charge has been to develop products that will be useful to students and that will enable them to learn and grow and complete comprehensive portfolios that document those experientially developed knowledge and skills.

The Prior Learning Assessment e-Portfolio Learning Community (LC) is comprised of cross-disciplinary cross-institutional faculty, professionals, administrators and technical specialists. Lorain County Community College (Lorain) and Cleveland State University (CSU) have been the key institutions involved to date (*early on Lakeland had agreed to be part of our project, but there was a change of personnel and it has not worked out*).

The LC is meeting the institutional priorities in Lorain's strategic plan: *Vision 21* which clearly address needs of both students and community; promote technological competence and workforce development; and promote collaboration and growth within and outside of the immediate infrastructure. All of the priorities address the learner, community, workforce and collaboration and technological sophistication required for local and regional success. In addition, CSU responds to the goal of continued development and implementation of the Assignment and Accreditation of Prior Learning Experience (AAPLE) Program in the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs. Associate Dean, W. Dennis Keating at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs was pleased to support this partnership with Lorain County Community College in

committing both staff time and College resources that led to the success of its E-Portfolio FLC.

Lorain's support and CSU's support is very strong. Both administrative structures are extremely supportive and helpful. Lorain's Vice President of Learner Services and Chief Academic Officer, Karen Wells, has continued to support the LC through personal efforts and through provision of in-kind match for the grant. Further support comes from all the different individuals listed earlier.

We hope this will not be the end of our project...in fact we are already thinking ahead to next year and what we can accomplish. Unfortunately, all of our core members and partners were unable to join us. It took us much more time to study, to gather resources, to analyze, and to develop our products. Thus, we were unable to implement our pilot course during this academic year. The course has just moved through the curriculum approval process so that we can conduct a pilot this fall with an experimental course designation. That pilot will begin in August but will conclude in December - after this project period ends.

We hope that we will be able to assist individuals who need to document prior learning and on-going learning experiences. Actually, we do not see an end to our project. Those of us who are actively engaged on a regular basis are likely to continue to seek ways to improve our products and to continue to learn.

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 a 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?

Early in our journey, we had expectations of including several other associate partners. That did not happen due to external circumstances beyond our control. But we continued on our path to build our team and to find ways to work together (and individually) to explore possibilities.

We established a schedule of monthly meetings with work to be accomplished by each member between times (and with email communication as we discovered new resources to share). As we met, the facilitator shared a variety of resources (identified by her and by other members) at each meeting. We also shared by purchasing several books in which members studied about electronic portfolios, prior learning assessment, team-based learning, teaching about related topics and others.

We had videoconferences, teleconferences and audio conferences to supplement our regular meetings. Members of the community also attended a day-long workshop on course redesign and academic transformation sponsored by LCCC's Center for Teaching Excellence. The speaker was Dr. Carolyn Jarman of the National Center for Academic Transformation.

Disappointing was the lack of response by other institutions who had agreed to be part of this effort...but we moved forward without them. Disappointing, too, was the frustration of trying to find times that would work for LC members to meet for regular meetings and for special sessions. For the January Institute, only two of us made the trip, and without our other members, we were unable to participate in the planning that was intended to take place during the afternoon session. Unfortunately, none of the Institutes were scheduled at good times for our LC. The Columbus Institute was on the first day of spring semester. We hope that at least half of our members will attend the June Institute in Newark..

G. 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?

As previously reported, our three major disappointments have been: 1) early loss of potential partners, 2) difficulty of scheduling planned and special meetings, and 3) conflicts with OLN Institute dates, so that our representation/participation was not nearly what we would have wished.

Basically, we have adjusted to each of these disappointments by maintaining our focus and momentum. Outside resources have helped our community deal with adversity.

Since all members are actively involved in a number of priority activities, we will continue to struggle with scheduling. However, individual dedication and individual effort - as it has this far - will keep us moving forward.

We discovered myriad examples of prior learning assessment programs and electronic portfolios being used. And we endured the wait to see if the curriculum committee would bless our course.

H. Description and reflections on implementation. Describe how your project work has evolved, including how what you do impacts member learning. Use critical incidents and vignettes to illustrate the action of your community's project. What are key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures, and how do you handle them? What have been your key successes? How have you leveraged these to your advantage?

We realized, early in our LC, that our work had to deal with three key elements before we could make major progress. First, we had to come to consensus as to our task and who was best suited to deal with specific components. Second, we needed to identify approaches, systems and products already available. Finally, we had to isolate and deal with unique needs of various disciplines.

One of our members had been a student who had taken a course on portfolio development at another institution. She provided us with a good overview of the process she was

required to use. Another member teaches portfolio development and she gave us the opportunity to look at her course (and it is a distance course that we could see on line!). These were extremely helpful examples as we considered the direction we should pursue.

We explored prior learning assessment and electronic portfolio use at other institutions of higher education. We found Hocking College's LC to be very generous to share their experiences with electronic portfolio. (Many thanks to the Hocking College Learning Community, headed by Judith Maxam!!!).

Personnel changes at Lakeland stymied their participation. Additional changes in schedules did not allow Oberlin to follow through.

We encountered problems using technology - on two occasions we were scheduled for distance conferences and, because of glitches, they took place late. We attempted to schedule our meetings in smart classrooms, but they were being used by regular classes...so we had to use portable equipment that was not always satisfactory. We continued to try to schedule rooms well ahead of time.

Our LC members are busy people with multiple responsibilities and sometimes cannot control their calendars. This created challenges for us to meet and to get work done. It was, on a couple of occasions, important for us to meet one-on-one rather than in the larger group. We did the best we could to conduct individual study between meetings and to share when we were able to convene our regular meetings.

We also found that we had the challenge of *getting on the same page* as it related to how we plan to use whatever process of prior learning assessment we chose. We discovered that we had to sort through stumbling blocks before we could develop any plans. We spent significant time discussing the process of prior learning assessment, and then we had to examine the best path that would lead us to an appropriate means of documentation.

I. **Key Resources:** Who and what are the beneficial people, organizations, materials, websites, and other resources you have utilized? What types of support did you receive from your departments, colleges, administration? Of all resources, which were essential and why were they essential?

In section D are listed those individuals (and their contributions) critical to the success of this effort.

Others who have supported our journey, at the administrative level, include:

Dr. Roy Church LCCC President	Extremely forward leaning and proactive in his management style, Dr. Church is committed to the ideal of LCCC enmeshing itself in both the local community and in the statewide educational community.
	He is more than just cognizant of our efforts, he is personally

	supportive.
Dr. Karen Wells Vice President for Learner Services and Chief Academic Officer	Dr. Wells has provided funds to meet matching requirements. She personally worked with the LC Facilitator to arrange for the workshop (and provided the funding of it) on course redesign. She has also given the facilitator release time to coordinate the Learning Community's efforts. She is very supportive of (and works actively with) all efforts of assessment, including ours focused on prior learning assessment via e-portfolio.
Mr. Jeff Cole Chief Accountant and his staff	Mr. Cole has taken time to make certain that we had our funding in good order, and that we could move forward appropriately.
Dr. W. Dennis Keating, Associate Dean, CSU	Dr. Keating supported this partnership with LCCC in committing both staff time and College resources that led to the success of its E-Portfolio LC.

J. Discussion. As you reflect back on the preliminary stages of your community and its focus and how it has evolved and developed over time, what are critical incidents, key questions and junctures that made a difference in how your community has evolved? What worked and why do you think it worked? What didn't work and why do you think it didn't work? What are the next steps in the cycle of reflective practice? The next steps may not be predicted and take you in another fruitful direction.

In the beginning, we had great plans to include two other partner institutions of higher education. While that did not work this year, we see possibilities for a future partnership.

Originally, we thought we would use lessons learned by the LCCC E Portfolio LC and would avoid problems it encountered (scheduling, space and equipment issues, etc.). We still met some of those same issues. We did, however, learn from some of the research they gathered on portfolio templates. We took that into consideration as we conducted our own research.

Should we continue our journey on a larger scale (which we believe we will), we plan to collaborate on service learning for and with students. We also plan to study and refine the prior learning assessment and the electronic portfolio components. We plan to share our learning with others.

K. 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?*

We have four products: 1) A criteria for prior learning assessment, 2) the Portfolio

Development Course, 3) a syllabi template, and 4) a survey focused on Emotional Intelligence, as a result of our work that will be used as we continue on our journey. And we have a new website in our Center for Teaching Excellence web page (ready by June 14, 2005).

We identified new expertise among our members and we know who to call upon when we have need for their help. We will share our work with faculty and others who have interest in learning. We have also recorded our journey, to this point, so that others can view and benefit from the path we traveled.

We learned who we could count on. We know that some wonderful opportunities lie ahead for our students because of our work. That is a great accomplishment. **Thank you OLN!!**

You have completed Case Study: 1st Year

Please send to Andrea Wood awood@oln.org

By JUNE 1, 2005

THANK YOU!