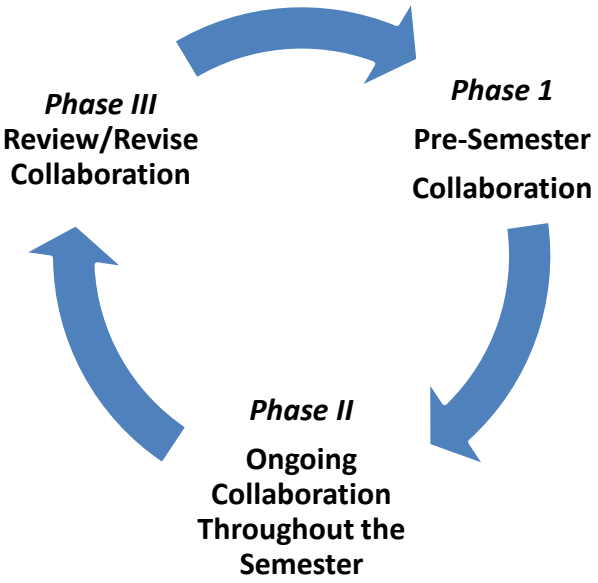
LC Workbook*

What Does the Collaboration Process Look Like?

The Collaboration Cycle



*Many thanks to the faculty and staff of Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, who graciously gave us permission to adapt the materials presented in this workbook

Building Your Learning Community

Whether you are new to LCs, a member of a newly linked team, or a member of an existing team hoping to improve the integration of your learning community, it is our hope that you will find this workbook useful. The worksheets on the following pages, and the supporting appendices, are intended to guide you through the challenge of building or strengthening a learning community.

Collaboration with your LC team, prior to linking, is essential. Initially, consider *your own* teaching style and preferences, your course, and your students, and get to know your team members in light of the same considerations. This will enable you and your team to take a group of individual courses and form strong bonds between them all. *(Worksheets 1 and 2)*

We suggest that your LC focus on an issue of direct relevance to your students (a "public issue") and include shared learning outcomes, and, ideally, course synchronization. By the end, you should be able to produce a course outline that includes a description of your learning community on each syllabus (including shared outcomes, public issue, assignments), and, in time, perhaps create a single, shared syllabus. This kind of visible integration helps to support your students' sense of being a part of an LC. *(Worksheet 3)*

Integrative assignments are at the heart of LCs and are designed to give your students an opportunity to demonstrate that shared student learning outcomes have been achieved. Student work on integrative assignments can be assessed from the perspective of the individual courses and can also be assessed for evidence of integrative thinking. It may be helpful to implement large assignments in a series of scaffolded stages. *(Worksheet 4)*

Active, student-centered pedagogies and practices, including small group and collaborative work, problem based learning, informal, low-stakes writing, and scaffolded assignments, are favored in LCs. *(Worksheet 5)*

It is important for all members of the team to be engaged in order to make the LC function as a coherent unit that supports student learning. Collaboration throughout the semester, ideally face-to-face, allows team members to model the collaboration we want our students to practice, and the cross-disciplinary integration we want our students to recognize. *(Worksheet 6)*

We encourage you, at the conclusion of your linking semester, to take stock of your LC as a team. A continuous loop of collaboration, including reviewing and revising your LC each step of the way, will yield a dynamic and successful LC. *(Worksheet 7)*

During the review and revision process we also encourage you to reexamine some student work submitted in response to your integrative assignment. Self-assessment of your assignment prompt and staging, in light of the resulting student work, can be very helpful in the redevelopment of your integrative assignment to encourage deeper integrative thinking. *(Worksheet 8)*

The steps above represent the process that faculty at Crafton Hills College follow as they link their courses and they reflect the accumulated knowledge and experiences of our LC coordinator and practitioners. We hope that you will find this process helpful, and that you will gain insight into your teaching, your classes, and your students.

Worksheet 1: Compatibility Quiz

Or

Would You, Should You, Teach with Me?

1. You are in class while your co-teacher is lecturing. Your co-teacher gives students a fact you know to be incorrect. What do you do?

    a. Nothing. You don't want to undermine your co-teacher.
    b. You wait until after class and tell your co-teacher, hoping he/she will correct the fact the following day.
    c. You interrupt your co-teacher with a question about the fact ("don't you mean…?").
    d. You interrupt your co-teacher on the spot so as to prevent the students from leaving class with the wrong information.

2. You are lecturing while your co-teacher is in class. You inadvertently give students an incorrect fact. What would you like your co-teacher to do?

    a. Nothing. You wouldn't want to lose credibility with the students.
    b. Wait until after class and tell you so that you can correct the fact the following day.
    c. Interrupt your lecture with a question about the fact.
    d. Interrupt you on the spot so as to prevent the students from leaving class with the wrong information.

3. How do you feel about students who come tardy to class?

    a. It doesn't bother me.
    b. It's not too much of a problem if it happens rarely and they come in quietly.
    c. You mark the tardiness in the grade book and take off points accordingly.
    d. It's a disruption that should not happen.

4. How do you handle students who talk while others are speaking?

    a. I ignore it. I am not a babysitter.
    b. I ask to speak to the students after class to talk about their behavior.
    c. I confront them immediately. I don't like disruption.

5. Your co-teacher is not pulling her weight. She is always asking if you would make that handout or those copies you need. What do you do?

    a. Do the work yourself; it isn't worth the conflict.
    b. Do the work yourself for awhile, and then when it builds up, confront it.
    c. Sit down with your co-teacher and confront her directly.
    d. Ask the LC Coordinator to intervene.

6. A cell phone rings in class. You

    a. Allow the student to take the call; it's clearly important.
    b. Reiterate your no-phone rule
    c. Answer it for the student; public humiliation is sometimes a good tool.\

7. More and more students aren't doing the work. How do you address the problem?

    a. Extend deadlines. They are feeling overwhelmed. Do nothing. It's their choice to do the work or not.
    b. Directly confront the individuals who are not doing their work; after all, they are the ones responsible.
    c. Confront them as a group about their behavior; the good students can then exert their influence on the bad.

8. In most LCs, there tends to emerge a "good guy" and a "bad guy." For instance, there usually is an instructor who students perceive as "nicer" or "easier," and they will often go to that instructor first with questions or requests. Which do you see yourself becoming? Why? How do you work with your co-teacher to mitigate this good guy/bad guy dichotomy?

9. LCs work best when each teacher is willing to give up 40% of his curriculum to engage the remaining 60% more deeply. What pieces of your curriculum are you willing to give up?

10. Consider your teaching philosophy. What parts of it are non-negotiable? (Think here about work load for students, course policies, relationship to students, etc.).

Worksheet 2: Foundations

1. How do you prefer to communicate? (e.g., work/personal e-mail, office/home phone, face-to-face?)

_____

2. How much time can you commit each week, before the semester begins, to plan the LC?

_____

_____

3. What are your meeting preferences during the semester (frequency, location, time of day, over breakfast or lunch)?

_____

4. What teaching approaches (e.g. lecture, group work, discussion, etc.) do you use? Would you consider adding some group work, some short free-writing, and/or more active student participation?_____

_____

5. How flexible are you concerning the sequence of course topics? Are you comfortable with a change?_____

_____

6. What is your attendance policy? _____

7. How do you assess student learning? (e.g., writing assignments, exams, presentations?)

_____

_____

8. How much reading and writing do you require of your students? _____

_____

9. What do you see as the specific challenges of working with students in your course?

_____

_____

Worksheet 3: Planning the LC

1. Your Course: _____

2. Your Student Learning Outcome(s) (SLOs): _____

_____

_____

3. Identify one or two shared SLOs for your LC that reflect some individual course SLOs.

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Discuss *real-world problems or issues of direct relevance to your students' lives* that also connect to the courses in your LC. Select one of these on which to focus integration throughout the semester.

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Brainstorm about some specific readings, films, web sites, local resources, etc. that can be shared among your courses to help connect them around your public issue.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 4: Creating Integrative Assignments*

1. Consider the connections that you expect your students might make among the courses in your LC in the context of this assignment. Draft an assignment prompt designed to invite integrative thinking.

   - ✓ Consider the public issue that you chose for your LC. What question, related to this public issue, do you want your students to explore further?
   - ✓ Consider what shared SLO(s) students will be invited to demonstrate in this work.
   - ✓ Consider what you expect your students to bring to the assignment *from each course* of the LC.
   - ✓ It often happens that student work satisfies the integrative assignment prompt, but fails to reflect real integration. Instead, students submit what is essentially two separate products connected by a transitional statement. As you draft your prompt look for ways to ensure that the only way to satisfy the assignment is by producing truly integrative work.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

* This worksheet is based upon the 2008 *Template for Integrative Assignments* produced by Veronica Boix-Mansilla and the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Consider the logistics of sharing and grading your integrative assignment.

2. What degrees of revision and drafting will you accept/require of your students?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Who will read what (e.g., first draft, second draft, final), and when?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. How will you grade the assignment (e.g., as a team, individually, cumulatively, etc.) and what criteria will you use? _____

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 5: Refining Integrative Assignments*

1. Consider your integrative assignment. What skills and/or knowledge would your students require to successfully complete this assignment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Break down the skill set and knowledge base needed to complete the integrative assignment. Design two or three class activities and smaller assignments to help students acquire these building blocks. (This is especially helpful for students requiring developmental and ESL support.)_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. How can these activities and smaller assignments be cumulatively sequenced, or *scaffolded*, so that students ultimately will be able to complete the integrative assignment?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

* For exploration of these concepts, please consult the resources listed in Appendix II, especially Bean (1996) and Barkley, Major, & Cross (2004).

Collaborative learning is a signature pedagogy of LCs. When students work collaboratively, they strengthen bonds with each other, participate in the social construction of knowledge, and actively engage and process.

4. Are the activities and smaller assignments you identified collaborative? If not, try to modify them to build in opportunities for students to collaborate, and list the modifications here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Offering opportunities for informal, ***low stakes writing*** within and among courses of your LC allows students to grapple with complex concepts. These need not be graded, but should count in some way toward the final grade. Some possibilities for low-stakes writing are:

- ✓ Short, informal writing assignments
- ✓ In-class summaries of significant concepts or processes
- ✓ Journals in which students respond personally (as well as analytically) to course material (textbooks, novels, observations, etc.)
- ✓ Reading log questions which accompany textbook reading assignments
- ✓ In-class responses to lessons, which provide contexts for reflecting on learning
- ✓ Short writing questions on exams

5. What low-stakes writing assignments might support the work of your LC? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 6: Sustaining Learning Communities

Things to do on a regular basis throughout the semester include:

- **Checking-in** with your linking partners about what is happening in their courses: "What is being covered last/this/next week?"
- **Discussing student progress and problems**. When appropriate, consult with Student Services and make appropriate **referrals** to other college services for students with special needs, e.g., tutoring, testing, or counseling.
- If possible, **visiting each other's classrooms** to reinforce the link in the students' minds
- If possible, **planning out-of-class experiences** to support integration and build stronger bonds between your team and your students.

Do you have other ideas for sustaining your LC during the semester? List them here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 7: Taking Stock

1. What aspects of your LC do you feel were most successful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What aspects of your LC do you feel were least successful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. In what ways do you think your team communication can be strengthened?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 8: Assessing Student Learning*

Review samples of student work (both more and less successful) submitted in response to your integrative assignment. Consider specific examples in answering the following questions.

1. What evidence of *focused disciplinary thinking* for each course of your LC do you notice in your students' work?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. In light of the previous question, how can you revise your integrative assignment *prompt* so that student work reflects more focused disciplinary thinking?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What evidence of *purposeful integration* do you notice in your students' work?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

* Parts of this worksheet are based upon the 2008 *Template for Integrative Assignments* produced by Veronica Boix-Mansilla and the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

In light of the previous question, how can you revise your integrative assignment *prompt* to foster greater, more purposeful, integrative thinking?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What course modifications can you make to provide support for your refined integrative assignment?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2: Best Practices Checklist

We recommend that you go through this checklist with your linking team at the beginning of your pre-semester collaboration, at the beginning of your linking semester, mid-way through your linking semester, and again at the end of your linking semester.

We've done this, and it works well for us!	We've done this, but it needs some development.	We've haven't done this yet.	Phase I: Pre-Semester Collaboration
☐	☐	☐	**Coordinate** with all members of your team and supporting staff (e.g., counselors and librarians).
☐	☐	☐	Identify a **public issue or theme** for the LC.
☐	☐	☐	**Synchronize the topics** in linked courses to maximize opportunities for students to make connections.
☐	☐	☐	Agree upon **shared student learning outcomes** for the learning community in addition to the learning outcomes for each course.
☐	☐	☐	Agree upon **shared resources** (including readings, web sites, films, etc.) that will speak to your public issue and foster integration.
☐	☐	☐	Develop an **integrative writing assignment** that will further the SLOs of the learning community, incorporate a library component to promote information literacy, and be read and graded by at least two professors in the LC.
☐	☐	☐	Design **scaffolding activities** (including **collaborative student work**, **low-stakes writing** assignments, library-based work, etc.) that will support the students' process of developing and completing a successful integrative assignment.
☐	☐	☐	Schedule **weekly communication** among the linking team members using e-mail, the telephone, or, ideally, face-to-face meetings.
☐	☐	☐	Design a **shared syllabus**, or separate syllabi, that include a common welcome message, shared student learning outcomes, shared readings, shared films, and a shared writing assignment.

We've done this, and it works well for us!	We've done this, but it needs some development.	We've haven't done this yet.	
			Phase II: Ongoing Collaboration Throughout the Semester
☐	☐	☐	**Check-in** with your linking partners about what is happening in their courses: "What is being covered last/this/next week?"
☐	☐	☐	Discuss **student progress and problems** at weekly meetings.
☐	☐	☐	When appropriate, consult with the Counselor regarding making **referrals** to other college services for students with special needs (e.g., tutoring, or testing).
☐	☐	☐	**Visit each other's classrooms** to reinforce the link in the students' minds.
☐	☐	☐	If possible, **plan out-of-class experiences** to support integration and build stronger bonds between your team and your students.

We've done this, and it works well for us!	We've done this, but it needs some development.	We've haven't done this yet.	
			Phase III: Review/Revise Collaboration
☐	☐	☐	Arrange a face-to-face meeting to **reflect** on the success of your LC, broadly, and the integration of your LC, specifically.
☐	☐	☐	**Assess** a sample of student work for evidence of integrative learning, and **revise the integrative assignment/s**.
☐	☐	☐	**Brainstorm** ways to strengthen your link.
☐	☐	☐	**Close the loop** by revisiting pre-semester planning.