

Proposal for Participation in the CASTL Leadership Program Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

In order to continue the work we have begun as a member of the Integrative Learning Project (ILP), Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) is enthusiastically applying to be an institutional participant in the CASTL Leadership program. We propose to work on and contribute to Institutional Theme C, *Liberal Education and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Our collaborations with other ILP teams have been so beneficial, we are eager to continue collaboration with other like-minded institutions through the CASTL Leadership program.

MCLA's commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning dates back over seventy years ago, when it was known as North Adams State Teachers College. Commitment to teaching and learning is our heritage, and we have never lost sight of that mission. Each faculty member receives an annual stipend for professional development. Because we are a teaching college and not a research university, most faculty members use their stipends to grow as teachers and learners. Additionally, we are recipients of a federal Title III grant, which is focused on professional development to incorporate technology into our liberal arts teaching practices. This year, five faculty members are recipients of Davis mini-grants to encourage and enable them to incorporate new technologies into their courses. MCLA sponsors the Brown Bag, a series of monthly meetings where faculty members share with the campus their teaching innovations and research.

With the renaming of our college to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts nearly a decade ago, we committed to providing our students with an integrative undergraduate experience that would enable them to develop the necessary understanding and critical thinking skills they will need to navigate this complicated world. Several years of intense campus conversations resulted in the implementation of an integrative Core Curriculum in 2001, which replaced a complicated and outdated list of unrelated courses our students had to take to fulfill their general education requirements. We recognized that students' various general education experiences had to relate to one another, and that we needed to develop ways to assess whether the students understood not only course content, but also whether they were making connections to other areas of their learning. In our Core Curriculum, students take two courses from each of four domains (Self and Society, Human Heritage, Creative Arts, and Science and Technology). These courses are called the Tier II courses, Tier I being the basic competency courses required of first-year students. Many of these courses are interdisciplinary, and Core courses must meet a set of outcomes which include research, communication, and analysis skills. The final course in the Core Curriculum is called the Tier III capstone course. This course is an upper level interdisciplinary experience which integrates content from two or more domains.

Our initial work with ILP, developing outcomes for the Tier III Capstone course for approval by MCLA governance, has been completed. We are now in the phase of development and implementation of these courses, which, in addition to their integrative nature, emphasize team-based, project-based experiences. The administration has

provided stipends for those developing Tier III Capstone courses, and is committed to continuing that support. Faculty members offering Tier III courses and those interested in creating such courses have met at least once each semester to discuss the process and progress of the various courses.

As a campus, we know and agree about what learning outcomes we want our students to have achieved upon graduation. These outcomes include an ability to assimilate disparate information and make connections within the information, to be able to assess and make conclusions based on thoughtful reasoning using that information, and to be able to effectively communicate those ideas and understandings to others. We understand that to be effective in helping our students meet those outcomes, we need to find ways to educate ourselves in learning techniques that will foster those skills. Additionally, we need to learn and use assessment techniques which will let us know when we have been successful and show us where we need to grow.

For the next stage of our journey towards providing a quality integrative liberal arts education for our students, we propose a series of roundtable workshops for faculty members interested and invested in the cause of integrative learning. There are several MCLA faculty members who have learned new classroom and assessment techniques, but there is currently no formal outlet for sharing this information. Any sharing of teaching/learning tips is done casually, usually at a lunch table or as a private conversation. We propose development of a 12-person team of faculty, who will meet bi-weekly during the school year. Each member of this team will commit to researching and presenting one aspect of teaching and scholarship to the other participants. In addition to the sharing of new information, there will be discussion as to how we can incorporate that information into our own classrooms. Examples of subjects covered would be active learning, classroom assessment, intentional learning, syllabus development, electronic portfolios, etc.

Utilizing advice, information, and resources from other CASTL institution partners, our five-member CASTL team would be responsible for setting the schedule and agenda of the workshops. Additionally, they would recruit participants, locate and bring in resources and outside speakers, and maintain the CASTL Snapshot webpage. Each of the five members has committed to participation in the roundtable workshop.

We are not interested in creating another list of things for our already over-worked faculty to do. We are interested in providing a safe place where faculty can be candid about their teaching experiences and help each other to grow as teaching professionals. We envision that this bi-weekly meeting would be structured such that attending it will inspire and rejuvenate participating members. The administration has committed to providing a stipend for members of this team as an incentive for participation, but we believe that the participation will eventually show itself to be the real reward.

We propose that these discussions will take place over the next two years (2006-07 and 2007-08) for two groups of 12-member teams. During the third year (2008-09), when we feel we should have sufficiently understood the literature and integrated it with our own

experiences in integrative learning, we will plan and offer a summer workshop (Summer 2009) for faculty from nearby colleges, both 4-year and community, where we can offer them the same experiences of learning and sharing in a supportive and restful atmosphere that we experienced at the Carnegie Institute in Palo Alto. It is our expectation that these meetings will take place in our newly renovated building, Murdock Hall, in the new Center for Teaching and Learning that is scheduled to open when the building opens in September 2006.

Once the summer workshop is complete, we propose to keep those relationships current by creating and maintaining a weblog and message board, similar to the COPPER site, maintained by a CASTL group from Eastern Massachusetts. If the summer workshop is very successful, we envision that the summer workshop could turn into an ongoing summer academy, devoted to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the context of integrative learning.

MCLA maintains relationships of varying natures with several colleges and universities, and thus we feel we are well-suited to be a leader in helping other colleges move towards teaching excellence. Below are some of our activities.

- We are an active member of COPLAC (Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges).
- We are an active member of NEEAN (New England Educational Assessment Network).
- We are a vital member of the Berkshire Compact for Higher Education, a county-wide strategy development group.
- MCLA is lead partner for the Berkshire STEM Pipeline, an NSF-funded network of colleges, schools and businesses in Berkshire County for the promotion of science, math, and engineering K-16 education.
- We were participants in the SENCER Summer Institute 2004 (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities), a national program dedicated to science education reform; we regularly participate in regional SENCER activities.

We have vibrant relationships with the local community colleges that send students to MCLA (Greenfield Community College, Berkshire Community College, and Mt. Wachusett Community College), and we envision that a summer institute with faculty from these institutions would give us an opportunity to discuss creation of courses that use integrative learning. We learned from ILP participants from community colleges that their administrations worry about the creation of integrative courses, because these courses may not transfer well to 4-year institutions. Hosting a summer workshop would be our opportunity to help community colleges that feed into MCLA create integrative experiences for their students while assuring them that we would gladly accept these courses for credit.

Our meetings will be documented as a collection of readings and faculty responses which will be posted on the CASTL Snapshot as they occur. How we evaluate the success of those meetings is a bit more problematic, but we will endeavor to assess and document them with a series of before-and after-questions for the participants. An example of such

questions would be: How are you assessing how well your students understand the content of your courses? Are you interested in how your students connect what they learn in your courses to other subjects? How are you finding out if they are making those connections?

In addition to sharing our results with other CASTL Leadership institutions, we plan to share our results and any new insights gained at various venues, including AAC&U meetings and NEEAN (New England Educational Assessment Network) meetings, of which we are active members. If we feel we have gained understanding that we have not seen in the literature, we will submit a paper outlining our experiences in a journal such as AAC&U's *Peer Review*. We are committed to keeping our CASTL Snapshot and proposed weblog up-to-date.

The following faculty members will comprise the MCLA team:

- Dr. Adrienne Wootters, Assistant Professor of Physics, is an original member of MCLA's ILP team, and is the primary CASTL contact. She is also lead team member for MCLA's SENCER project and active on MCLA's professional development committee.
- Dr. Michael Birch, Assistant Professor of English/Communications, has familiarity with modern technological innovations in the media. His expertise in media technology will aid the team in dissemination of our final product. Dr. Birch is a strong advocate of integrative learning, coming to MCLA in part because of his enthusiasm for our integrative Core Curriculum
- Dr. Susan Birns, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, is director of MCLA's Women's Center. She is also a member of the SENCER team; her participation in this initiative has made her a vocal proponent of active learning techniques in the classroom.
- Dr. Michael Ganger, Assistant Professor of Biology, is another member of the SENCER initiative. He is currently teaching *Biodiversity*, a course for non-science majors that folds public policy concerns into a more traditional biology course. He is a recipient of a Davis mini-grant to aid incorporating technology into this course.
- Dr. Matthew Silliman, Professor of Philosophy, is currently teaching a pilot Tier III capstone course, *Science and Human Values*. This course was developed last summer according to the outcomes developed by the ILP team. Dr. Silliman has extensive experience with assessment of critical writing, and he is eager to share his expertise with others.

Contact Information

All members have the following mailing address:

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
375 Church St.
North Adams, MA 01247

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| Adrienne Wootters*, Physics | awootter@mcla.edu | 413-662-5459 |
| Michael Birch, English/Communications | mbirch@mcla.edu | 413-662-5375 |
| Susan Birns, Sociology/Anthropology | sbirns@mcla.edu | 413-662-5521 |
| Michael Ganger, Biology | mganger@mcla.edu | 413-662-5344 |
| Matthew Silliman, Philosophy | msillima@mcla.edu | 413-662-5449 |

*Primary Contact

Websites that illustrate MCLA's areas of involvement in integrative learning and collaboration:

- ILP Snapshot
<http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=50171837>
- Davis Grant for incorporation of technology into the classroom:
http://www.mcla.edu/Academic_Technology/davisgrant.html
- SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities)
<http://www.sencer.net> <http://wootters.tripod.com/SENCER>
- 2006 AAC&U Presentation on development on our capstone course, presented by Adrienne Wootters and Stephen Trainor, Salve Regina University: *Integration by Design: AAC&U's Integrative Learning Project on Two Campuses*
<http://www.aacu-edu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/AM06/ConcurrentSessions.cfm>
- Title III Grant
http://www.mcla.mass.edu/Publications/News_Press_Releases/20050317122346.php
- Berkshire Compact for Higher Education
www.mcla.edu/compact
- Professional Development Partner for the Berkshire Wireless Learning Initiative
<http://www.bwli.org/about.php>