

2018-2019

# Report from the Integrative Learning Professional Learning Community, 2018 - 2019

---

## *PLC Members*

*Dr. Erin Baumgartner, Interim Associate Provost Academic Effectiveness*

*Dr. Melissa Cannon, Division of Behavioral Science*

*Dr. Adry Clark, Director, Service Learning & Career Development*

*Dr. Jessica Dougherty, Division of Teacher Education*

*Dr. Breeann Flesch, Division of Computer Science*

*Dr. Patricia Gimenez-Eguibar, Division of Humanities*

*Dr. Leigh Graziano, Division of Humanities*

*Dr. Mary Harden, Division of Creative Arts*

*Dr. Becka Morgan, Division of Computer Science, PLC Chair*

*Beverly West, Project Manager Academic Affairs*

---

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
First meeting .....	2
Process and Methodology .....	2
Rubric.....	2
What does integrative learning mean? .....	3
TK 20 .....	4
What the data tells us.....	4
Collective observations, concerns .....	6
Beyond PLC and Moving Forward .....	7
Guidance for future PLC .....	8
What worked well? What could be better next time? .....	8
Protocols for PLCs/meetings.....	8
Structural .....	8
A Personal Note from Dr. Becka Morgan.....	8
What would we like to see come out of this PLC? .....	9

## Introduction

### First meeting

The Integrative Learning (IL) Professional Learning Community (PLC) met for the first time on 5 October, 2019 for two hours. This time was spent working together as a group norming the IL rubric. During this meeting, we addressed the criteria for each of the five features of the IL rubric.

During the norming process, we discussed various examples from our disciplines to understand the criteria from different viewpoints. We felt that this was more beneficial than having examples given to us. We felt that prescribed examples would have forced us to norm the rubric rigidly to the example. Bringing our own examples from our various disciplines helped us think about Integrative Learning more deeply and from several perspectives we may not have considered otherwise. Our approach helped us develop a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the rubric.

### Process and Methodology

After the norming group meetings in October and November, the Integrative Learning PLC met once a month for 2 hours during winter and spring terms. For those of us who were new to this process there was a moderately steep learning curve. It took time to get a handle on the process in order to fully understand how to be effective in our role.

Given the potential obstacle of this learning curve, we spent time at each meeting discussing some examples of assignments we had assessed as a group. During these discussions we were able to re-norm our understanding of the rubric as well as focus the committee on the expectations we were uncovering. As we continually re-normed around the rubric, we were able to formulate ideas about how we could make the rubric clearer.

Reflecting on this process as a group we would like to suggest that, as a university, we continue to recruit new members to the work done on these PLCs. We all found great value in what we have learned and encourage the recruitment of new PLC members so that this process can be continually owned by a broader section of our campus. We would like to suggest that in addition to the volunteer recruitment process, there should be intentional recruitment that seeks out new members, perhaps by creating a curated list.

### Rubric

The committee found that, based on the review of assignments submitted, the language of the IL rubric is not clear to many of the faculty submitting to this category. As a committee we may have come to an understanding of what the rubric was asking for, however this is not the case for the campus community. We saw that there were many assignments we felt were poorly aligned to the rubric based on this lack of clarity.

As an example of this lack of clarity, many assignments were submitted with alignment to the Integrated Communication feature with seemingly the idea that "I have what I think is an integrative assignment and it includes communication". Within these submissions was often a prescribed way of how the student should communicate. We, as a group, interpreted this Integrated Communication feature to be focused on students making the choices of how to communicate what they are learning and what they bring to this communication.

Given this disconnect we saw with the rubric and its implementation it was evident to us that the introduction of this ULO is not clear to faculty. We saw that the importance of this work is not always transparent. The university has provided instructions and materials; however, many faculty may feel overloaded with their current workload. The addition of the need to learn how to participate in assessment work adds to this pressure, and assessment seems to be put on a back burner.

### What does integrative learning mean?

---

*“Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.”*

---

The above definition, taken from the rubric, is a good start. However, we did not feel like it captures the entirety of the work around this learning outcome. We found the pieces lacking from this definition are how a student knows about these connections and where they get the information about how things are connected. We believe that these connections need to be embedded in curriculum; students should be explicitly taught what the connections are and how to identify them during lower level courses, so they can apply this knowledge in their upper division courses.

To facilitate this work faculty need to understand how to use reflective work and self-assessment to afford opportunities for students to engage in integrative learning. We found that the following paragraph from the rubric could be useful in promoting the understanding of designing assignments that promote IL learning outcomes:

---

*Assignments to foster such connections and understanding could include, for example, composition papers that focus on topics from biology, economics, or history; mathematics assignments that apply mathematical tools to important issues and require written analysis to explain the implications and limitations of the mathematical treatment, or art history presentations that demonstrate aesthetic connections between selected paintings and novels. In this regard, some majors (e.g., interdisciplinary majors or problem-based field studies) seem to inherently evoke characteristics of integrative learning and result in work samples or collections of work that significantly demonstrate this outcome. However, fields of study that require accumulation of extensive and high-consensus content knowledge (such as accounting, engineering, or chemistry) also involve the kinds of complex and integrative constructions (e.g., ethical dilemmas and social consciousness) that seem to be highlighted so extensively in self-reflection in arts and humanities, but they may be embedded in individual performances and less evident. The key in the development of such work samples or collections of work will be in designing structures that include artifacts and reflective writing or feedback that support students' examination of their learning and give evidence that, as graduates, they will extend their integrative abilities into the challenges of personal, professional, and civic life.*

---

# TK 20

## What the data tells us

Looking at the data from TK-20 it is apparent that there is a significant disconnect between how the faculty rated outcomes of student work and how the same work was assessed by the PLC (see Figures 1 – 5 below). Across all features faculty rated student work higher by a large margin. This suggests a lack of understanding of the rubric as well as how to apply it.

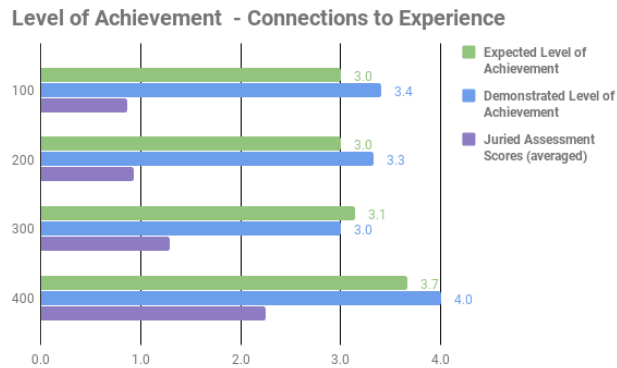


Figure 1 - Connections to Experience

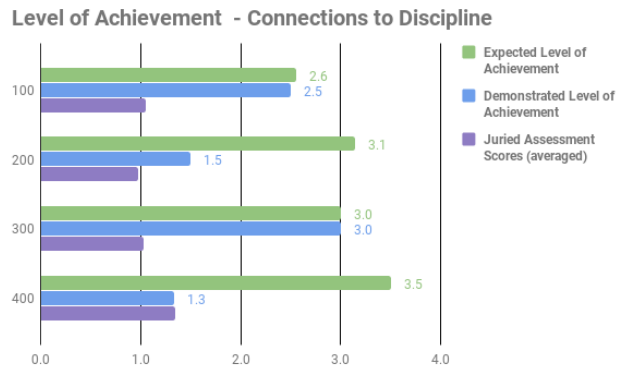


Figure 2 - Connections to Discipline

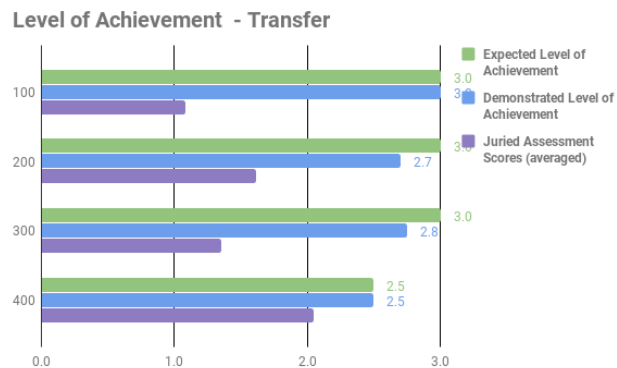


Figure 3 - Transfer

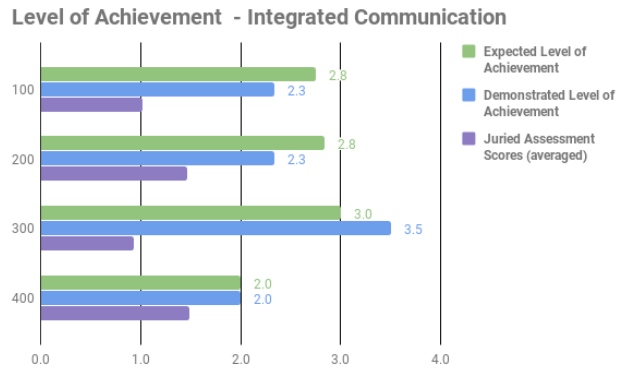


Figure 4 - Integrated Communication

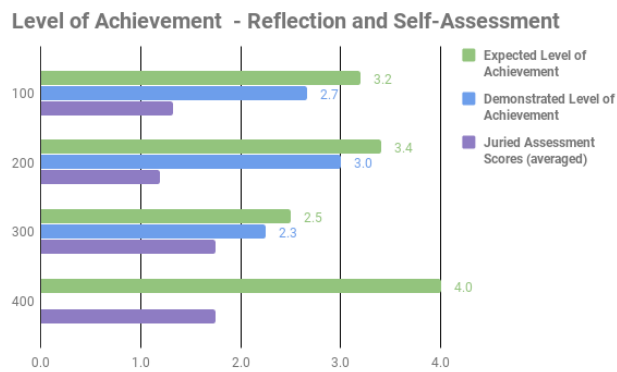


Figure 5 – Reflection and Self-Assessment

While there was a significant difference in the application of the rubric by faculty compared to the PLC within the LACC courses where student work was submitted, there was an even distribution of work in 100 through 400 level courses (Figure 6). However, the non-LACC submissions, where no student work was submitted, the data tells a different story (Figure 7). The assignments submitted in this category is skewed toward the 400 level classes. This indicates that in this group of submissions there was a belief that the assessment outcomes would be demonstrated in mostly senior level courses. This is at odds with viewing assessment as a continuation through each level to scaffold the skills for success in 400 level courses.

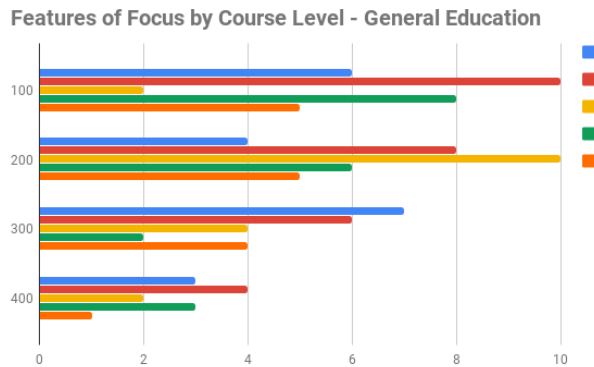


Figure 6 - Features by Course Level General Education

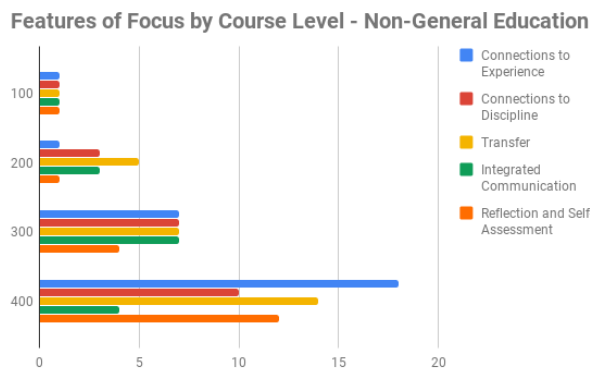


Figure 7 - Feature by Course Level Non-General Education

## Collective observations, concerns

The main observations about the rubric implementation was that the least observed features were Reflection and Integrative Communication. For the assignments submitted that faculty aligned to Reflection, we as a committee found that the prompts were too directed to allow for genuine reflection on the part of the students. The assignments submitted for Integrative Communication was similarly flawed as students were directed on specifics of how to communicate rather than having the option to find the form of communication that suited their messages.

As Integrative Learning was one of the last two ULOs to be assessed, we sensed that some of the alignments were inauthentic. It seemed as though some faculty could not fit their courses or assignments to any other ULO, so defaulted to IL. Often it appeared as though the assignments were fit to the rubric rather than using the rubric to create assignments. There was a significant difference in the way faculty looked at the implementation of this ULO and how we, as a committee, were assessing the outcome.

The committee felt that faculty were concerned that they would get in trouble for not doing this assessment work “right” or that it would be seen as a failure if students weren’t meeting outcomes. There seems to be a misunderstanding of the nature of assessment being used to create curriculum, assess outcomes, and then use the assessment outcomes to scaffold additional information to help students reach goals. This is an iterative process to improve our programs over time. In this vein,

assessment needs to become meaningful for people to help students reach deeper learning and not just be a box-checking exercise. The more we can get people involved the more they will be able to see the benefit of assessment.

Additionally, considering the concern for “doing it right”, we noted that people feel like they put their assignments into a black hole and don’t know what happens with it. Although it is not feasible to give feedback for all submitted assignments, we feel that some form of feedback would be helpful. Alternatively, having an understanding of what happens to the assignments and what they are being used for would be beneficial to faculty upfront.

## Beyond PLC and Moving Forward

One of the main takeaways from this committee work is that we need to clearly tell faculty what we are using their assignments for and why we are doing this work. We need a mechanism to carry the message to them that we are using these assignments, these rubrics, assessment as a whole so that we can assess the University, as well as assessing the rubrics in order to tailor them to WOU. This is where we define the outcomes that transform our student experiences, create our individual program goals, and set our collective goals together as a university. It is within this cohesive framework we will be able to distinguish ourselves.

During the accreditation visit, it was pointed out that there is a lack of institutional support. The accreditors suggested that there is a need for a position devoted to assessment that could provide guidance, support, and training to faculty. We recognize that this work is time intensive and that in order to foster a culture that supports this practice it would be advisable to have a director of assessment.

As a group, we also discussed ways that information could be disseminated to the community at large. We came up with several ideas such as presenting information during division meetings, allowing us to address what happens with the assignments they submit and how the information is used to build a better system. We could hold workshops, either campus wide or at a division level guiding the practice of assessment based curriculum design, or creating assignments from the rubrics. We can use the outcomes of PLCs to talk about how things can be improved. Another idea is to send out reports with exemplars of what we thought was a good example of demonstrating a learning outcome from the rubric and a specific criteria level being met. We could contrast this example with an example of an assignment that would not meet the same criteria. This report would give readers a solid understanding of integrative learning, that it is not just putting two ideas together, but that it includes students participating in the choice of how the outcomes are expressed.

Disconnects the data points to regarding the interpretation of the rubric by faculty, the non-gen ed submissions that significantly target 400 level courses, and the siloed application of a ULO that is integrative points to an opportunity to bring people together from different disciplines to promote integration naturally from different perspectives. This work is already being promoted in First Year Seminars and can be built upon for this ULO.



## Guidance for future PLC

### What worked well? What could be better next time?

Meeting together to assess assignments, and then discuss the results allowed us to continuously re-norm our understanding of the rubric. In the beginning, this was especially important to iteratively improve our understanding of the learning outcome features. This deepened understanding of features helped us learn to differentiate the performance descriptors at each different level of attainment. However, we found that we needed more of a consistent practice to handle the “not applicable” or “not demonstrated” options.

In a majority of the cases where we marked an assignment as “I could not score this”, we felt that we did not have the content knowledge to assess the given assignment. This could have been easily addressed with an extra prompt to each instructor asking them to explain why they think the assignment is demonstrating the learning outcome chosen and at the level noted.

### Protocols for PLCs/meetings

Upon reflecting on our experiences together, we found that it would have been helpful to meet more frequently in the beginning of our PLC. We felt that many of the lessons we learned dissipated during the month before we met again. We felt that more frequent meetings in the beginning, allowing for more intensive norming, would have helped build a more solid practice. For later meetings we could have engaged in asynchronous review, allowing us to spend our in person meeting time discussing exemplars, outliers, and any problematic disconnects from understanding the rubric that were found. We believe that the asynchronous reviews would be enhanced with reminders and timelines to keep the committee on track.

### Structural

Being a member of an assessment PLC allows us to emphasize to members of our respective divisions the importance of this work. It is not an extra burden placed on faculty, but rather an opportunity to consider our programs from a more holistic point of view. We have the opportunity to promote assessment based curriculum design and pulling the entire curriculum together to form a cohesive program.

### A Personal Note from Dr. Becka Morgan

Before joining this assessment PLC, I had little knowledge of the specifics of the ongoing work being done on campus. I was aware that assessment was important and valuable, I just didn't understand what it was, and, like many of my colleagues, I already felt overwhelmed by my workload. It has been invaluable to be a part of this PLC. I have a new, deeper, and more robust understanding of the rubrics we use, how assessment works, and, most importantly, this work has drawn me to learn about assessment-based design. In July 2019, I attended the NW Summer Institute on Scientific Teaching to learn how to do assessment based curriculum design. It is this effect, which comes from participation, that I believe is so valuable to all faculty. We need to make space for new people and find ways to communicate how exciting this work really is. My involvement happened because of Dr. Erin Baumgartner asked me if I would join a PLC at the assessment kickoff and planning event last year. I am not sure if I would have become involved in this work without Erin's invitation. It is not that I did not want to be involved; the invitation to join made me feel valued.

## What would we like to see come out of this PLC?

1. Templates to show people how to design an internship course, service learning and other in-class IL assignments.
2. Making sure that faculty that submit these really have the time to read the rubric - if you just rely on the features without reading the framing language, that can lead to a disconnect.
3. Annotated exemplars of integrative assignments.
4. Ultimately putting together some sort of resource for people who want to do more of this kind of learning in their courses and want to get started.
5. Signature assignment that aligns to your ULO workshop (specific to IL).
6. Rubric refinement to incorporate a common understanding.
7. Build a practice and a culture where we expect people to build an assignment around the rubric.
8. Build a culture that encourages interdisciplinary work, creating opportunities for discussion across disciplines to create opportunities for integrative collaboration.