

## IN THIS ISSUE

- From the Executive Director
- AGLS Award Program
- ACTC 14th Annual Conference
- AGLS Maine Conference Call for Papers
- Exemplary Session Articles from Fairfax Conference
- International Conference: Engineering and Humanities

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# AGLS News

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*The Newsletter of  
the Association for General  
and Liberal Studies*  
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## From the Executive Director AGLS Strategic Plan

**H**ow fast two years have flown by, and how far AGLS has come in retrospect.

In May 2005 the Executive Council gathered at the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College to plot a course for its next decade of work. The “Strategic Plan” emerged over the next 10 months. Let me take a moment to track our progress over the last 14 months.

The heart of AGLS, council members felt, is a collegial organization of diverse discipline experts respected for their common commitment to general and liberal education. Council members not only felt that this feature of AGLS could not be lost, but had to be enhanced, even as we focused our energies on those goals not addressed by other professional organizations with similar missions.

Three goals emerged out of those May 2005 discussions by the time our “Strategic Plan” was officially adopted in February 2006: For the future, then, AGLS seeks to:

- Promote the Quality and Centrality of General and Liberal Education in the United States and Abroad
- Clarify the Relationship between Assessment and Learning in General and Liberal Education
- Foster a Stronger Relationship between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges in General and Liberal Education

Certainly our initial emphasis has been to help “clarify the relationship between assessment and learning in general and liberal education.” Past president Rob Mauldin sensed the growing need for such work as early as 2002, developing contacts with regional accreditation organizations to clarify their expectations for general/liberal education. That early document became the impetus behind our newest publication, “Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment & Program Review.” More than 225 copies of this publication have been sold in less than a year.

Where “The Guide” was meant to provide a creative approach to program review and to place assessment in its valid, critical place within the learning process, two other

projects more directly “promote the quality and centrality of general and liberal education in the United States and abroad.” Just last month AGLS announced a new national recognition program, the “2007 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Practices.” This program is meant to recognize programs committed to ongoing improvement and to provide models of effective ideas and processes for other programs to emulate. Along with our two existing awards—the Joseph Katz Award and the Jerry G. Gaff Award—AGLS renews its commitment to acknowledging leaders and practices that promote quality general and liberal education.

The second new project meant to promote general and liberal education in the states and abroad is an international conference, “Integrating Engineering and Humanities in Higher Education: The Bologna Process and Beyond” to be held March 6 & 7, 2008, at the Darmstadt Conference Center, on the campus of Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. The Darmstadt Conference, organized cooperatively by AGLS, VDI (Verein Deutscher Ingenieure—the Association of German Engineers), and DGPF (Deutsche Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung—a German philosophical society), will bring together college and university educators and administrators from both sides of the Atlantic. The academic host institutions are TU Darmstadt and Virginia Tech. Presentations and discussions will focus both on the learning outcomes of general education for engineers in the U.S. and Germany and on innovative ways of successfully integrating humanities studies within the education of engineers.

Much of the hard work on our third strategic goal—fostering a stronger relationship between two-year and four-year colleges in general and liberal education—has occurred at this point at administrative and organizational levels. AGLS national conferences, beginning with this past October’s meeting, will be co-sponsored by a four-year and a two-year organization, nominations for the

*Continued, page 2*

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## From the Executive Director, continued

Executive Council now must consider two-year colleges as one factor in balancing council membership, and conference organizers will seek to feature speakers, themes, and sessions of interest to both two- and four-year members. Other ways to strengthen relationships among institutions will be the subject of Executive Council conversations in the near future.

Finally, in the planning stage is a “Resource” section of the website which will feature position papers, research documents, the developing catalog of AGLS award-winning Effective Program Processes, and such conference presentations as those by AGLS members at March’s AAC&U General Education and Assessment meeting and April’s 2007 Annual Meeting of the Higher Learning Commission.

The mission statement for AGLS begins with the following sentence: “AGLS serves colleges and universities by helping students and faculty enjoy the benefits of a liberal education attained through quality general education.”

When I initially joined AGLS more than two decades ago, that commitment is what drew me to this organization. When I rejoined five years ago, I sensed that such a mission was still relevant, though we seemed to have lost a sense of how to move forward in a new century. That is not true anymore. If you have been with AGLS the past two years, thank you for all your input and support. If you are considering joining us, come visit us at our next national meeting in Portland, Maine—in October, no less. (Proposals for sessions are due June 15th.)

Of course, further information on all of these initiatives and projects can be found on our website (<http://www.agls.org>), or feel free to email ([pranieri@bsu.edu](mailto:pranieri@bsu.edu)) or call me (765.284.4698).

Enjoy your summer, everyone.

*Paul Ranieri*  
*Ball State University*

## AGLS Award Program recognizes effective improvement processes

Most general education program faculty and administrators can appreciate the sentiment expressed in Thomas Edison’s words: “I have not failed. I’ve found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Dedicated faculty constantly reevaluate their teaching, searching for more effective methods. Program administrators understand the perseverance required to create or improve a program. However, improved education does not require the birth of entirely new ideas, and as easy as it is to admire Edison’s determined effort, general education can be improved by the study of a few good models.

One goal of the new AGLS Awards for Improving General Education is to provide models of effective teaching and program administration processes. A second goal of the new awards program is to give national recognition to the creative efforts of the faculty and administrators responsible for the development of these models.

The 2007 awards will recognize the effective processes employed in developing a new general education program or the creative processes used to make an existing program work better. Both award categories are based on the continuous quality improvement concepts and questions found in the AGLS publication *Improving Learning*

*in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review.*

Award application and directions for completion can be found on the homepage of the AGLS website at: [www.agls.org](http://www.agls.org). The application deadline is June 15th.

Winning institutions and processes will be recognized at the AGLS Annual Conference to be held Oct. 18-20 in Portland, Maine. Institutional representatives will be asked to present a discussion of their award-winning processes. Additional recognition includes a plaque, listing in the AGLS Newsletter, and a description of the program process to be included in a catalog of winning processes made accessible through the AGLS website. Presenters will also receive half-priced conference registration and membership for the upcoming year.

Prior use of the Guide is not a qualification for the award, although individuals interested in purchasing copies can do so through the AGLS website. What is required is a process that has worked for your institution and might work for others.

*Michael Gress*  
*Vincennes University*

### ACTC 14th Annual Conference

The Assoc. for Core Texts & Courses will hold its 14th Annual Conference, April 3-6, 2008, at the Radisson Plymouth Harbor Hotel in Massachusetts. ACTC invites Thursday afternoon workshop proposals. Theme and plenary speakers to be announced. See [www.coretexts.org](http://www.coretexts.org).

Conference sponsors and co-sponsors include Assumption College and St. Anselm College. We hope both the venue and spring dates will make this our largest conference ever.

*J. Scott Lee*  
*ACTC Executive Director*

## Call for Proposals 47th Annual Meeting of AGLS Oct. 18-20, 2007, Eastland Park Hotel, Portland, ME

### Featured Speakers

- Devorah Lieberman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Wagner College
- Stephen D. Spanghel, Director, Academic Quality Improvement Program, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- Others yet to be confirmed

### Integrating General Education: Building Curricula, Assessing Programs, and Modeling Best Practices

This year's conference will highlight three long standing concerns of general education program faculty and administrators: strengthening and improving general education instruction, program coherence, and assessment. Keynote speakers will address these topics. Concurrent sessions will provide multiple examples of model program management, proven general education pedagogy, and innovative curricular practices. Of special interest are presentations by winners of the 2007 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education. Pre-Conference workshops will focus on continuous quality improvement, on building curricula, and on the effective administration of programs in General and Liberal Education.

### Pre-Conference Workshops (Thursday morning, Oct. 18)

- "Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review"
- "Civic Engagement and the General Education Curriculum"
- "Administrative Problem-Solving for General Education Administrators"

Workshop sponsored by the Council for Administration of General and Liberal Studies (CAGLS)

### Accommodations

Participants will stay at the historic Eastland Park Hotel in downtown Portland. The Eastland Park Hotel is located in the heart of the acclaimed arts and shopping district. Across the street from two museums, the Eastland is just steps from many fine restaurants, shops, and the Old Port, Portland's working waterfront. Rates for the conference are \$129/night if staying three nights and \$149/night if staying fewer nights. These rates are for both single and double occupancy and include free parking.

### Transportation

Portland, Maine, is easily accessible by direct flight (airport code PWM) or by ground transportation from Boston or Manchester, NH.

### Special Events

Mainly Tours of Portland sponsors local sightseeing tours both on land and on sea featuring local points of historical interest, lighthouses and harbor seals (for details, see <http://www.mainly-tours.com>). Maine's seacoast provides a relaxing and picturesque setting for a weekend in October.

### Registration

The registration fee is \$225 if registered before September 30th 2007; \$250 after that date. Registration includes a year membership in AGLS; membership benefits include the "AGLS Newsletter," listserv access, and The Journal of General Education. Registration also includes continental breakfasts during

the conference, the evening receptions, and lunch. Refunds are available if registration is cancelled in advance before Sept. 30, 2007 (less \$25 handling fee).

### Proposal Guidelines

AGLS encourages presentations from students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Sessions that address the conference theme and actively engage the audience are especially encouraged. Proposals should be submitted as 1-2 page Word documents covering the following information:

- Title of presentation
- Type of presentation (e.g., panel, discussion, roundtable)
- Names, titles, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of all presenters. If more than one person, please identify a contact person.
- Abstract (limited to 75 words) of presentation
- Extended summary (limited to 250 words) of presentation
- AV equipment needed for presentation. Technology should enhance, not duplicate, the presentation
- Any accommodations needed for presenters

### Proposal Deadline

June 15, 2007  
Submit as an attached Word Document to [pranieri@bsu.edu](mailto:pranieri@bsu.edu)  
Current information available at [www.agls.org](http://www.agls.org)

### AGLS Mission

AGLS serves colleges and universities by helping students and faculty enjoy the benefits of a liberal education attained through quality general education.

AGLS is a community of learners - faculty, students, administrators, alumni - intent upon improving general and liberal education at two-year and four-year institutions. AGLS identifies and supports the benefits of students' liberal education attained through general education programs. As an advocate, AGLS tracks changes in general education and liberal studies, and sponsors professional activities that promote successful teaching, curricular innovation, and effective learning.

### AGLS Goals:

- Promote the Quality and Centrality of General and Liberal Education in the United States and Abroad
- Clarify the Relationship between Assessment and Learning in General and Liberal Education
- Foster a Stronger Relationship between Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges in General and Liberal Education

AGLS News is published quarterly. **Marianne Hopper, editor**; Dean, University Programs, St. Edward's University. **AGLS News online:** [www.agls.org](http://www.agls.org)

AGLS/AIS Fairfax Conference Article October 2005

## Reflecting on Reflective Learning in an Interdisciplinary Curriculum

My session was about the reflective process that creates ethical discourse in the classroom and in society in general. Within an interdisciplinary curriculum, reflection is crucial to making cross-connections and seeking clarity in thought. I described how reflection and reflective learning techniques were employed to facilitate discussions of diversity, tolerance, and advocacy in three undergraduate courses at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Two of the courses were considered social systems classes where one course focused on social, political, and economic class issues and the other course looked at the legacy of colonialism in a rapidly globalizing world. The third course was an environmental studies class developed to be a student-centered learning lab. Each course was team taught in a seminar style and had its own theoretical and applied variation on the reflective learning theme.

Teaching for diversity, tolerance, and advocacy is no easy task. Each of these aspects of human socialization entails complex interactions with others over issues with strong emotional content and psychological attachment. Diversity is a concept with wide and varied application. There are examples of diversity in natural systems in regard to species differentiation. Animals, plants, and other living organisms exist in myriad versions and varieties. In the context of societal relations, the labels of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and religious affiliation reifies diversity in human populations. Such differences in social classification can unite a group or divide groups based on particular traits, commonalities and/or stereotypes. Misunderstandings, discrimination, conflicts and all manner of social injustice can ensue when differences get in the way of kindness, cooperation, sensitivity, and reciprocity.

While diversity can be divisive, tolerance is the first step toward beginning to understand differences in the social and cultural makeup of other people. Tolerance creates an environment for change in practical ways for it makes people re-evaluate their values and behaviors.

Advocacy is when you turn your passion for an issue into visible and ver-

bal support through direct action. Similar to activism where activists engage in direct action for themselves as well as for others, the advocate speaks mostly in behalf of others who do not have the ability or consciousness to speak in their own behalf. Advocacy, generally, means that a person takes on a cause that he or she feels strongly about and is willing to support that cause publicly. An advocate's position can be in favor of certain rights for specific human populations or maybe advocacy for animals, plants, or the environment.

Diversity, tolerance, and advocacy can have common themes or interconnections, but it is not always the case. Diversity in nature has nothing to do with intolerance in society and a person may advocate for a cause that is against diversity and promotes intolerance. However, diversity, tolerance, and advocacy can work in unison if social justice is the goal. These themes were important ideals of the Civil Rights Movement and remain relevant for today's society. What I believe bonds these concepts together is critical reflection on rights and justice in a society. Of course rights and justice are aspects of human values that take into consideration fair and equitable treatment of other people.

As a reflective practitioner I approached the three undergraduate courses with a plan to engage the students more deeply with the reading material. In an interdisciplinary curriculum, the student perspective is an anticipated outcome of reflective thinking. It does not matter what the perspective is, all perspectives are personal and valid in the mind of the holder of that perspective. Still, a perspective is more valid than an opinion. Opinions are snap judgments that bear little verifiable information or critical reflection. But, a perspective takes into account many sides of an issue and weighs the pros and cons before the perspective is rendered. With this goal in mind for the courses, I hoped that reflective learning would provide students with valuable and insightful perspectives on diversity, tolerance, and advocacy. Of course there were many other relevant themes and topics of research, reflection, and discussion explored in the content of these courses, but under the paradigm of social justice,

the concepts diversity, tolerance, and advocacy were central to the type of reflection that I sought from the students.

Teaching is normally considered the process of transferring information and knowledge, but its ultimate goal is to affect learning outcomes. However, there are many ways to learn and many things to learn so the way one facilitates the learning process has considerable influence on the nature of knowledge connections, comprehension, and insights. In the Western College Program at Miami University, there is a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary curriculum, seminar style courses, and team teaching as essential elements of student-centered learning. Interdisciplinary studies and team teaching readily include elements of adventure and serendipitous discovery.

As team teachers we discovered that we shared similar perspectives on many things and hoped to draw the students into similar discoveries of common interests and commitment to intercultural understanding with us, with their peers, and with an international community. Much of such discovery involves self-reflection in order to understand another's worldview.

In the classes where I implemented reflective learning methods I used mixtures of personal and synthetic reflection since there were real-world components to each class and a heavy emphasis on reading and writing in the courses as well. The reflective techniques used in the classroom were partially common academic exercises one would observe in many courses such as reflective essays, discussion groups, and portfolios. But, in many instances, the reflective learning methods are my sole creation and were designed to address specific complexities in the course material.

I consider reflecting self-centered, but not selfish. Reflective learning is insightful and introspective by making the student confront one's limitations of knowledge and experience. It is not a substitute for experience and expertise, but a complement to the readings by making the content more acceptable to the student's psyche. Reflective learning techniques add a context to the content.

I acknowledge that there are many ways to learn and reflection is just one part of the process. There is endless ped-

agogy, research, and practice in higher education on the philosophy and praxis of learning and pathways to knowledge. Still, it is hard to deny the necessity of reflection in education since humans seek perfection in themselves and self-improvement comes through some form of self-reflection. In the three undergraduate courses I used a myriad of teaching, writing, learning, valuation, and assessment strategies and tactics in and out of the classroom to set the stage for reflection. It is likely that in some instances reflection did not take place and the student got little out of the exercise. This is to be expected in higher education. There is no 'magic bullet' for learning. But, conscious attempts were made to enhance student sensitivity to issues of social justice. This is a focus that was occasionally emphasized in the classes. All the same, it is a theme that ties in well with how I see the framework for teaching for diversity, tolerance, and advocacy.

Social justice awareness is foundational to good citizenship, and a fair and equitable society. Principles of social justice awareness are built into most of the courses I teach although it is not always overt. The notions of diversity, tolerance and advocacy were, also, subtle compo-

nents of the three undergraduate courses.

The course on *Class* was a seminar with an emphasis on *diversity*. Being a course that covered the inequalities and inequities of social and economic stratification, it looked at class diversity which often impacts issues of race, gender, and national origin as well. The reflective learning strategy was to provide intermediate exercises tailored toward selected readings. This process entailed personal and synthetic reflection by drawing the student into the readings in a more emotionally engaging manner.

The course on *Colonization and Neo-colonialism* taught the students *some things about tolerance*. By exploring the history of colonialism including slavery, land acquisition, the establishment of colonies, cultural imperialism and the resistance of indigenous people we attempted to build understanding of a number of key issues, including: ethnic politics and racism, syncretism, cultural change, international monetary policy, the role of religions, states, and markets. By using a variety of writing methods and teaching techniques we attempted to enhance the appreciation of other peoples' histories and cultures and facilitate the process of reflective learning. The reflective learning strategy was used to

enhance personal and synthetic reflection through out-of-class events, expository writing, portfolio development, and poster exhibitions.

Lastly, I considered the *Environmental Seminar* a celebration of advocacy. Each student was expected to be passionate about some environmental subject or issue, and each student demonstrated throughout the semester how strongly they felt about various environmental problems and offered solutions. That is the true measure of when reflective learning is taking place. Most people see the problems and often feel that these problems are insurmountable. But throughout the duration of all of these courses where I infused reflective pedagogy into the curriculum, I have seen a deepening self-awareness in the thoughts of students and some glimmers of hopefulness. Although I do not know the extent of the changes in student perspectives or worldviews from taking these classes, at least I can rest assured that I provided the louvers to crack the windows to their souls.

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**International Conference: March 6 & 7, 2008 • (Presentations by Invitation Only)**  
The Darmstadt Conference Center • Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany

## Integrating Engineering and Humanities in Higher Education: The Bologna Process and Beyond

The Bologna Process is a revision of the European higher education system. A stimulating panel about this process at a recent AGLS conference opened possibilities for international cooperation on improving higher education, particularly through better integrating curricula in the professions with study of the humanities and social sciences. The Bologna Process, we realized, becomes increasingly beneficial as such possibilities are considered. Thus, from the ideas and interest generated by that AGLS panel, this Darmstadt Conference has been born.

The Darmstadt Conference, organized cooperatively by AGLS, VDI (Verein Deutscher Ingenieure—the Association of German Engineers), and the DGPF (Deutsche Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung—a

German philosophical society), will bring together college and university educators and administrators from both sides of the Atlantic. The academic host institutions are TU Darmstadt and Virginia Tech. Presentations and discussions will focus on the learning outcomes of the general education of engineers in the U.S. and Germany. Innovative ways of successfully integrating humanities studies in the education of engineers will be exemplified.

ABET (Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology), the recognized U.S. accreditor of higher education programs in engineering and technology, and ASIIN (Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Informatics/Computer Science, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics), its German counterpart, are guides and sup-

porters of this conference; DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), Germany's academic exchange service, and Fulbright are among its sponsors; conference participants and presenters will include representatives of U.S. and German universities.

The conference will take place at the new Darmstadt Conference Center at TU-Darmstadt, a short bus-ride from the Frankfurt International Airport.

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AGLS/AIS Fairfax Conference Article October 2005

## A Process-Oriented Approach to Teaching Integration

While writing my textbook, *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to*

*Interdisciplinary Studies, 2nd Ed.*

(Augsburg 2006), I discovered that William H. Newell's theory of interdisciplinary studies, which was first published in 2001, was not his first attempt at delineating the interdisciplinary process. Embedded in two of his previous articles (Newell 1983; Newell and Green, 1982) are early articulations of his later theory. While Newell and Green first attempted to describe the process in 1982, Newell presented it more clearly in his 1983 article.

In that article Newell claimed that, out of an array of possible views of interdisciplinary studies, the "problem-solving conception of interdisciplinary studies is the most fruitful" (p. 1). Taking his assertion seriously, I attempted to introduce Newell's 1983 model to entry-level students in an introductory interdisciplinary studies course at Arizona State University. While it is nowhere near as comprehensive as Newell's more recent theory, his 1983 conception of interdisciplinary study may better serve the purposes of entry-level students. The early model presents the integrative process as a sequential process that necessitates multiple perspectives. It introduces the idea of integration, albeit incompletely. It allows students to experience and therefore determine for themselves the necessity of doing research early in the integrative process. The weakness of Newell's 1983 model can be eventually overcome by introducing his more recent theory, but clearly additional subsequent coursework, time, research, disciplinary knowledge, and methodological mastery are all critical for successful integration at the undergraduate level.

### Newell's 1983 Conception of Interdisciplinary Studies

Newell (1983) described the integrative process without delineating it into steps or calling it as such. I broke down Newell's description into the following seven distinctive steps:

1. Become struck by a "confrontation" with a complex phenomenon.
2. Formulate an interdisciplinary question.

3. Gather all relevant disciplines.
4. Consider the problem/question through the perspectives of each discipline, one at a time.
5. Gather together all the insights gained from each discipline.
6. Evaluate all the insights.
7. Fashion an interdisciplinary response to the question. (Newell 1983)

Newell wrote little in the 1983 article about the seventh step. By 1999 Newell would greatly expand upon what happens between Steps Six and Seven, and in so doing offers much insight into the mysteries of integration (see Newell 2001, in press).

### Creating a Worksheet

I created a worksheet based on Newell's 1983 model incorporating two elements from Hursh, Haas, and Moore (1983): I added their step of identifying "salient concepts" as an optional step as well as their final evaluative step of the entire integrative process. I additionally incorporated a student development approach intended to help students recognize interdisciplinary problems that could be of potential personal, educational, and professional interest. The worksheet remains otherwise faithful to Newell's 1983 conception of interdisciplinary studies, although its design has been clearly influenced by his later work. For example, I borrowed from Newell's forthcoming revision of his theory and attempted to frame the integrative process in terms of decision making wherever possible in the worksheet. My slight modification of Newell's 1983 conception of interdisciplinary study reflects Klein's (1990) position that "there is, and can be, no single model of the interdisciplinary process" (p. 191).

### Teaching Newell's 1983 Model

My experiences led me to conclude that the integrative process, in order to be taught effectively, has to be an integral component of course content, with an appropriate percentage of the course grade reflecting student effort and work. Accordingly, I developed a four-stage process of teaching the integrative process. Stage One involves passive learning, during which the instructor presents material. Stage Two includes

active learning, during which students grasp the material through class activities, group work and individual homework assignments. Stage Three provides students with the opportunity to master the integrative process through collaborative learning. Students team up to do group work utilizing the integration process, culminating in each team either demonstrating the integrative process in action or teaching an application of it. Finally, Stage Four involves instructor's evaluation of student work and instructor assessment of the process that is greatly aided by student feedback.

### Discussion of Initial Findings

What the worksheet approach does fairly well for students is to help them identify interdisciplinary problems of potential research interest. It is also successful in helping students identify various disciplinary perspectives. The optional step of identifying salient concepts had mixed results. The worksheet was weak in helping students form an interdisciplinary response. Students rarely developed comprehensive responses that ventured beyond the obvious. In my judgment, however, this shortcoming speaks less to the weakness of the worksheet approach than to three basic lacks prevalent among entry-level students. First, students typically lack familiarity with disciplinary research. Second, students often experience a lack of time not only to read but also to do research and plan their presentations. Third, the worksheet approach foregrounds the vagueness of Newell's 1983 model. Newell's 2001 theory and its forthcoming revision greatly elucidate what is involved in "fashioning an interdisciplinary response."

Despite these shortcomings, I received positive student feedback about the worksheet approach. Such anecdotes suggest that teaching students Newell's 1983 model of the integrative process could help them better address interdisciplinary problems both inside and outside the classroom.

*Tanya Augsburg*  
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(Contact author for references)

# AGLS Executive Council

*The following is a list of Executive Council members. If you have any issues, concerns or questions you would like taken up by the Executive Council, please contact us. We would like to hear from you.*

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