

# Learning Communities in the Community College

Learning communities are classes that are linked during an academic term and enroll a common cohort of students. A variety of approaches are used to build learning communities which are all intended to intentionally restructure students' time and learning experiences to build community among students, between students and their teachers, and among faculty members and disciplines.

There is no single model of a learning community that will work in every college and every subject area. Successful learning communities are those that have been adapted to the particular needs and goals of a college or program. **Community colleges that have designed effective learning communities have reported dramatic increases in retention, persistence, and student & faculty satisfaction.**

## **Benefits of learning communities and paired courses**

- Learning is contextualized and applied in a variety of contexts. Over time, synthesis becomes second-nature.
- Students learn different approaches to the same/similar content.
- Faculty benefit from considering overlaps between course content, pedagogy, and expectations. LC faculty usually engage in metacognitive explorations of how students of their discipline learn and apply new concepts.
- For developmental education students, strategies learned in a DE class can be immediately applied in an authentic curriculum context. Students can successfully embark upon curriculum coursework at the same time they continue to improve their college-level reading and writing abilities.

## **Models of learning communities**

- **Linked or paired courses** (each course taught separately with some joint assignments, projects, and discussions; students are encouraged to co-register, but not required)
  - Pros: easiest to start; instructors choose own level of comfort with adjusting course content, timeline, and assignments.

- Cons: if co-registration is not required, joint projects and discussions will be limited and/or some students will feel left out.
- **Interest groups** (student cohort co-enrolls in three or more courses; students meet with peer advisor; little to no co-planning; faculty involvement mainly at the social level)
  - Typically a residential university model.
- **Learning clusters** (two to four courses linked by a common theme, historical period, or issue)
  - Used successfully at many community colleges, particularly if facilitated by faculty with experience in interdisciplinary approaches.
- **Learning communities** (three or four courses linked by content, theme, or structure. May include a seminar where content is processed and synthesized)
  - Dozens of successful LCs at community colleges nationwide.
  - Pros: learning is contextualized and applied in a variety of ways; after the intensive planning work, faculty report greater sense of community among themselves and with the students; faculty report a renewed interest in their own professional/academic development; positive correlations with retention, persistence, and student/faculty satisfaction.
  - Cons: advising/registering needs ongoing supervision and adjustment; takes a team a full school year to develop a strong LC; need to develop—and enforce—procedures for students who want to drop just one of the courses and for faculty turnover.
- **Coordinated studies programs** (multidisciplinary program of study)
  - A university model of a blocked program around a central theme with faculty participating in all parts of the program using team teaching methods.

### Levels of integration

- Team teaching (fully integrated courses with both teachers present for all class meetings)
- Content linkage (themes, historical periods, issues, problems)
- Structural linkage (assignments, projects, journals, syllabus)
- Strategy linkage (emphasis on **how** to learn, **what** strategies work best, and **when** to apply them)
- Social linkage (cohort of students with a peer facilitator)

**How might LCs work at SCC?**

\*Thematic Arts & Sciences/Careers/Health Learning Communities  
Communicating in the Workplace COE 112, ENG 114, OST 236, COM 110  
Technology and Society HUM 110, ENG 114, SOC 210  
Reading and Writing the Mind ENG 111, CIS 111, HSE 110, PSY 150

\*Thematic Developmental & Curriculum Learning Communities  
Joining the College Community ACA 115, ENG 060, RED 090, ENG 090  
Express Yourself! ACA 115, ENG 095, ART 111, COM 110  
Service Learning ACA 115, ENG 090, RED 090, PSY 150

**Areas within or related to my curriculum where learning communities already exist**

**Additional areas within or related to my curriculum where learning communities might be extended/fostered**

**Scheduling, placement, and advising concerns**

**Other ideas . . . Next steps?**