

Learning Communities: History, Practice, and Promise

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First-Year Interest Groups
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Today's agenda

- What is a learning community?
- Background and history of learning communities
- Common learning communities models/trends
- Discussion of models in practice
- Approaches to assessment/expected outcomes
- The future promise of learning communities, including their role in institutional reform
- Discussion/questions/answers/sharing of experiences

First things first...

- Introductions
- Who are you?
- Where are you from? (institution/learning community program?)
- Why are you here at this session/what do you hope to learn?
- I'll begin...

What is a learning community (LC)?

Any one of a variety of curricular structures that **link together several existing courses** –or actually restructure the material entirely– so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more

interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise

Early history of LCs

Alexander Meiklejohn at UW-Madison
The Experimental College (1920s)

*"important that **students know each other**
intellectually and that they
know their teachers personally"*

*"understanding is **integration**"*

Joseph Tussman at UC Berkeley/SUNY-Buffalo
(1960s)

Modern LC history

Mervyn Cadwallader (*two year* - San Jose, SUNY, Evergreen State, 1970s)

Patrick Hill (*FLCs* at SUNY- Stonybrook 1980s)

Roberta Matthews (*linked courses, learning clusters* at LaGuardia CC, 1980s)

Faith Gabelnick (*honors programs, FLCs*, at U of Maryland, W. Michigan, 1980s)

Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean MacGregor (The Washington Center late 1980s)

Early 1990s – first rigorous studies of LCs
Late 1990s – LC explosion across the country

Shifting from Meiklejohn's original vision
to the needs of the individual institutions contexts – *differentiation and adaptation*

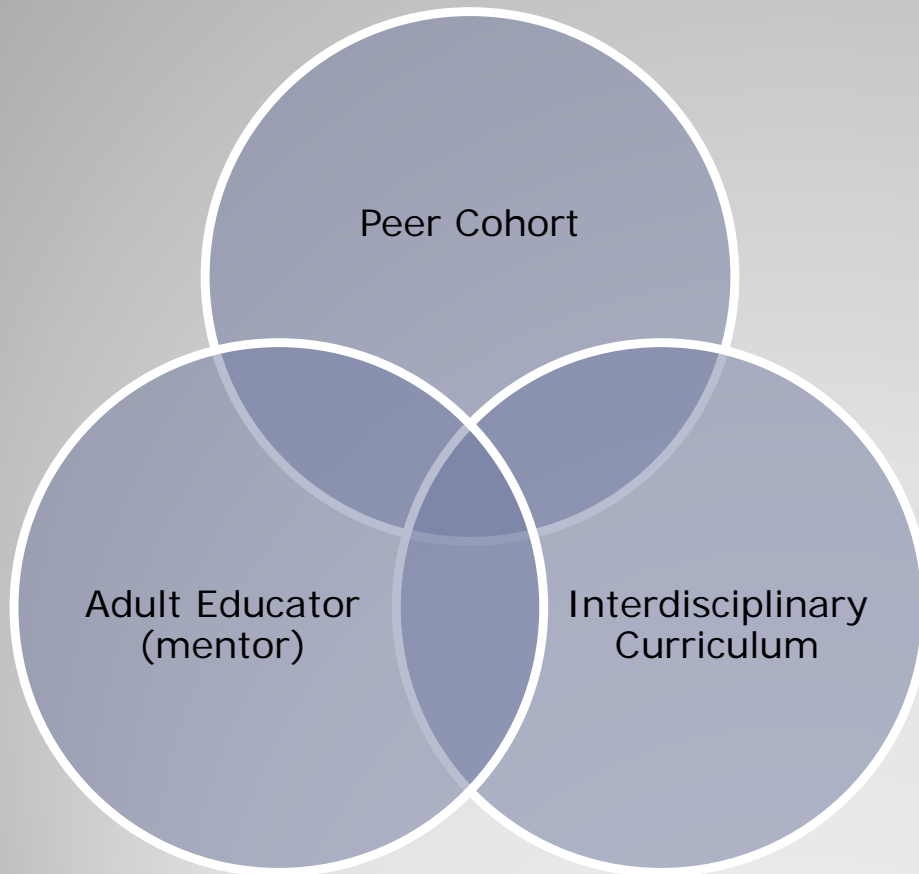
Learning Community Models

- **Linked Courses** (two independent –often large– unrelated courses, common students)
- **Learning Clusters** (two or more smaller courses, potential link, common students)
- **Freshmen Interest Groups “FIGs”** (courses linked by theme, often with a “success seminar,” common students) – *alternatively “First-Year Interest Groups”*
- **Federated Learning Communities** (courses linked by theme with synthesizing course, typically designed/proposed by faculty)
- **Coordinated Studies Programs** (integrated, theme-based, interdisciplinary curriculum designed through faculty collaboration, supports a career/major focus, cohort based)

Other variations (potentially in conjunction with the above)

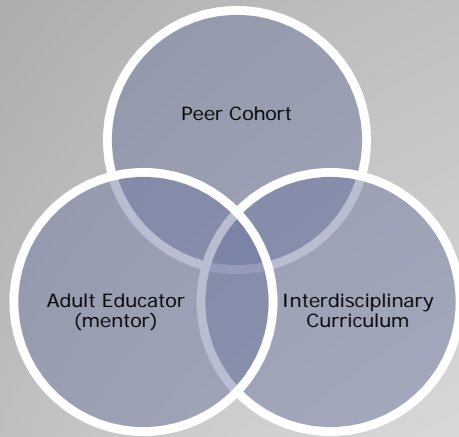
- Residential Components
 - Themed Floors
 - Success Seminars

A theoretical model of learning communities (what do they all, in general, have in common?)

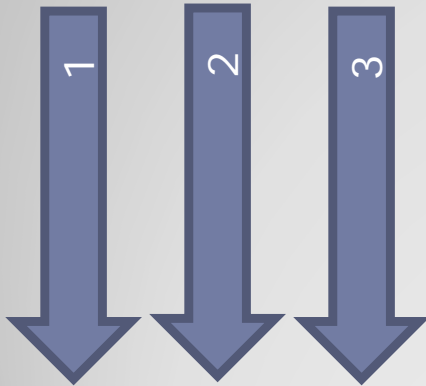


- 1) A small group of students making up a peer cohort
- 2) Access to an adult educator who often serves as faculty/mentor
- 3) Some degree of interdisciplinary curriculum formed by linking multiple classes

LC Components in continuum



- 1) A small group of students making up a peer cohort
- 2) Access to an adult educator who often serves as faculty/mentor
- 3) Some degree of interdisciplinary curriculum formed by linking multiple classes



- *Residential communities/themed floors*
- *Linked courses*
- *Learning Clusters*
- *FIGs (with College 101)*
- *Federated Learning Communities*
- *Coordinated Studies Programs*

Beneficial outcomes frequently associated with LCs

- Friendships, community, a sense of belonging, educational satisfaction
Tinto, V., Goodsell, A., & National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, 1993; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tinto, 2003; Yaqub, 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004
- Collaborative learning, academic skills, social skills, involvement
Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Laufgraben & Shapiro, 1999; McNeal & Stirton Weaver, 2001; Tinto & Goodsell, 1993; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Tinto, 2003; Visher, Wathington, Richburg-Hayes, Schneider, & The National Center for Postsecondary Research, 2008
- Intellectual energy, confidence, agency, self-esteem, validation as learner
Bloom, Sommo, & MDRC, 2005; Brower & Dettinger, 1998; Goodsell, 1993; Scrivener, Bloom, LeBlanc, Paxson, Rouse, Sommo, & MDRC 2008; Smith, 2010; Weiss, Visher, Weissman, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011; Tinto, 1993; Weissman, Butcher, Schneider, Teres, Collado, Greenberg, & The National Center for Postsecondary Research, 2011; Yaqub, 2010
- Appreciating others' perspectives, openness to new ideas, increased complexity of worldview, developmental gains
Avens, Zelle, & Daytona Beach Community College, 1992; Baker & Pomerantz, 2001; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003; MacGregor, Tinto, & Lindblad, 2000; Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Goodsell, 1993; Hotchkiss, Moore, Pitts, 2006; Kellogg, ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, & George Washington University, Washington, DC Graduate School of Education and Human Development, 1999; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Smith, 2004; Tinto, 1993; V. Tinto, Love, & The National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, 1995; Zhao & Kuh, 2004

Gains in grade point average (GPA), Retention

LCs as a vehicle for institutional reform

Redefining the role of faculty

- Most LC studies describe faculty as advisors, mentors, facilitators or mediators (Fiksdal, 2001; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999, Meikeljohn, 2000)

Teaching practice

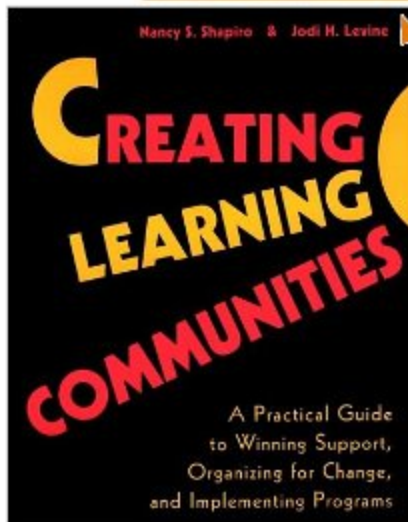
- LC faculty more energetic/innovative in the classroom (Stark & Lattuca, 1997)
- Focus on pedagogy more than non-LC faculty (Smith, 2004)
- LC faculty value collaborative and team teaching approaches and actively seek them out (Hegler, 2004)

LC faculty as a tool for institutional reform

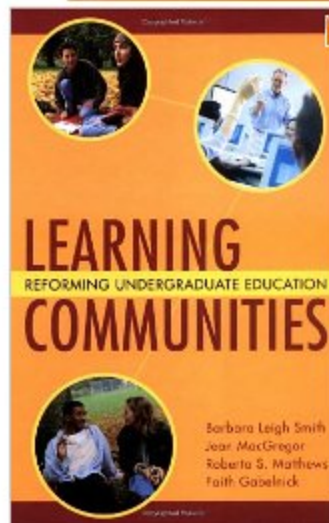
- LC faculty often identify more as teachers than experts in a specialized discipline (Lindblad, 2000)
- LC faculty break down disciplinary barriers to facilitate interdisciplinary experiences (Smith & McCann, 2004)

The UW-Madison Experience

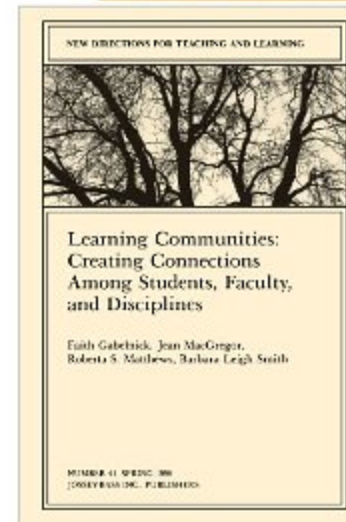
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