



Benefits of Learning Communities

Benefits for Students

- Become more engaged in learning
- Interact with exceptional faculty
- Fulfill requirements for your major or to transfer
- Develop lasting friendships with students who have similar interests
- Build a community with students from diverse backgrounds
- Make connections between different subjects

Benefits for Faculty

- Collaborate with other faculty
- Interact more with students
- Create more engaging teaching experiences
- Work with faculty from other disciplines
- Foster a climate of innovation

What students have to say about Learning Communities:

- “The learning community has given me confidence enough to be comfortable in myself and want more than I did before.”
- “I learned effective ways of working with others in a group. I also learned how to be a more responsible student.”
- “It is really nice to be on such a personal level with my classmates. It makes it easier to plan study groups and to speak out my opinions.”
- "My time in this English class and the learning community has been very good. I got to grow and strengthen my skills in writing, and read a book I normally wouldn't have chosen. I was able to learn more about myself and experience an online class. Overall, I would recommend the learning community to anyone entering Ohlone."
- “I think that the most valuable thing that I have learned is basically how to be a better person.”
- “It has helped me to stay motivated to come to class.”
- “I enjoyed the experience of the learning community. Having all of my professors talking to one another and combining subject matter was an interesting way to go.”
- “The most valuable thing about being in a learning community was the ability to learn and connect the different subjects together to gain a more complete understanding of all subjects.”
- “It was a great experience that I would definitely recommend!”
- "It had been over a year since I had taken an English class, and the last English I took was ENG-151B, which I dropped. I was a little scared. However, participating in the weekly discussions really helped, and made me feel I was part of the class. It helped me in my critical thinking, which was something that really needed to be worked on. I am glad I took the class."



Creating an Ohlone College Learning Community

Learning communities promote student success by fostering connections across disciplines, incorporating active, collaborative, and technology based learning methodologies, and promoting greater curricular coherence. In order to ensure that your learning community is a success, make sure to follow these steps:

Step 1: Talk with your Dean

When you have an idea for a learning community, because it will affect the courses you teach, your teaching load, or your teaching schedule, it is critical that you discuss participating in a learning community with your Dean. Once your Dean has approved that you are able to teach in a learning community, you can move forward by talking with the Learning Communities Coordinator.

Step 2: Talk to the Learning Community Coordinator (Allison Bly)

The Coordinator assists faculty in developing their communities and informs students about the benefits of learning communities. It is therefore important that the Learning Community Coordinator know as soon as possible that you are interested in offering a learning community.

If you have a learning community idea but are unsure of which other faculty to include in the community, talk with your Dean or the LC Coordinator. It is important that you recruit faculty who are passionate about what they teach and who would be enthusiastic about starting a learning community.

The Coordinator also works with Curriculum and Scheduling to get the learning community information printed in the Class Schedule. In order to have your learning community listed in the Class Schedule, you must contact the Coordinator with your intention to offer a community by the following dates. The earlier you let the Coordinator know, the better:

For a Fall Community: Dec. 1

For a Spring Community: April 1

Learning Community Coordinator Contact Information:

Allison Bly, x6519, ably@ohlone.edu

Step 3: Create a Theme

Once the faculty have come together, decide on what the theme will be for your learning community. It should be one that encompasses topics covered in all learning community classes. Teams will also want to create a catchy title that will appeal to students. Here are some examples of learning communities offered at both Ohlone and other colleges:

- Debate Today's Issues with Tomorrow's Leaders (Ohlone)
- On with the Show. In English? (Ohlone)
- What's a True American Woman? (Cabrillo)
- California Dreamin' (Ohlone)
- Less Stress, More Success (San Jose City College)
- Between Two Worlds (Hartnell)

***Notify the Coordinator once a theme and title have been decided.**

Step 4: Develop Connections

In order to have an effective learning community, there needs to be a connection among students and faculty across disciplines. Use the “Learning Community Planning Worksheet” handout to assist you in developing connections in the following areas:

- Student learning outcomes
- Learning activities using active and collaborative learning methods
- Assessments

Step 5: Determine Necessary Resources

Determine what resources you will need to ensure students’ success in the learning community. Money may be available to use for projects or field trips. Contact the Learning Community Coordinator with any funding requests or for assistance with acquiring other resources.

Step 6: Advertise!

All learning communities that are created before the deadlines (see Step 2) will be listed in the learning community portion of the Class Schedule. Students who attend a New Student Orientation will also receive a handout of current learning communities and a general learning community brochure.

It is also possible to create a small advertisement for your learning community that can be included in the Class Schedule. If teams would like an individual learning community advertisement, please submit ads to the Learning Communities Coordinator before the following deadlines:

For Fall Semester: January 30

For Spring Semester: May 1

Make sure to follow the guidelines for Class Schedule advertisements (see “Guidelines for Class Schedule Ads” document).

Other suggestions for LC advertising:

- Create a flyer and email it to the Coordinator so that it can be made into a link on the learning community web page
- Tell your current students about the LC program
- Work with IT to send an email to a targeted group of students (for example, send an email to all students currently in ENGL-151B, telling them about a community that offers ENGL-101A the following semester)
- Post flyers (although this is not usually very effective due to the large volume of flyers around campus)

Step 7: Complete “Learning Community Planning Worksheet”

In order to receive the \$500 stipend, each learning community team will need to complete the document, “Creating an Ohlone College Learning Community.” This form must be turned in to the Coordinator by the third week of classes. Faculty will be paid the stipend in the last pay period of the semester.

Step 8: Assess the Success of the Community

At the end of each semester, both students and faculty in the learning communities will be given a survey about their experiences in the learning communities. It is very important to complete the survey as it will be used to help improve the learning community program.

Starting Spring 2009, research will be conducted on how successful students are in the learning community compared with the general population of students (for example, GPA, students' persistence and retention rates, etc...).



Guidelines for Class Schedule Ads

- All ads must be submitted to the Learning Communities Coordinator prior to the established deadline. Space in the schedule will become more limited as we receive more ads and it may not be possible to include all ads. Deans should be aware of what ads are being submitted for learning communities.
- Ads must be submitted to the LC Coordinator electronically, as a Word attachment. All ads are electronically sent to our graphic artist, thereby necessitating that the creator send an electronic copy. Ads should not be included as text within an e-mail message, since this requires that the ad be formatted so it can be sent electronically.
- Graphics for ads should be tasteful and appropriate to a collegiate publication. The graphic artist will add an appropriate graphic if a graphic is not included with the original ad.
- Graphics and text should be formatted to be readable in a space approximately 3.5” x 2”. Please keep this size in mind when creating your ads and ensure that your graphics will be legible in this size.
- Ads referring to a specific course should include the synonym number for that course in order to aid students in registering for the advertised course.
- Ads for cross-referenced courses will be inserted in the schedule for both departments, on a space available basis. Creators should indicate the preferred department if there is only room to include the ad once.
- Any information to be included within the course listing must be sent to the Division Office for input into Datatel as a Comment.
- The course information in your ad must match the information in Datatel. Specifically, the course title, day, time, and room must be the same in both the ad and Datatel. Please check with your Division Office for any questions regarding the official course information.
- Course numbers should include a – between the department and course number; i.e. ENGL-101A, not ENGL 101A.
- Ads will only be included in the Class Schedule if the class will be offered during that term.
- Ads should be free of abbreviations (i.e. intro, info, approx.) as much as possible.
- When using “new” in your ad, clarify what is “new” (i.e. new course, new course time, first time course has been offered for that term, etc.)
- Late ads will not be included in the schedule, due to strict deadlines to ensure delivery of the schedule on time.
- The Scheduling Office maintains the right to edit ads for content, grammar, space, appropriateness, and consistency with the class listing.



Learning Community Planning Worksheet

One of the major objectives of a learning community is to develop connections between classes. This planning worksheet is a guide to assist faculty with creating common themes, projects, and other learning experiences for students. All new learning community teams should submit this worksheet to the Learning Communities Coordinator by the third week of classes. This document is necessary to receive the \$500 stipend.

Learning Community Title _____

Courses: _____

Semester _____

Faculty _____

Type of Learning Community (see “Learning Community Models”)

- Themed Community
- Linked Community
- Coordinated Studies

Student Learning Outcomes for the Learning Community

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes (How will you assess that students achieved the learning outcomes?)

Text Books (What text books will be used? Can the same book be used for multiple classes within the community? If not, what themes are similar between textbooks?)

Projects (What cross disciplinary projects and/or assignments will students complete?)

Other Planning Questions

How will faculty work together to ensure the success of their students?

How will the learning community enhance connections between/among students and faculty?

How can you incorporate collaborative teaching and learning into the curriculum?

How can you collaborate with other faculty or programs at Ohlone?



Learning Community Models

There are several models of learning communities. Each model represents an approach to learning that involves linking course around a common theme or question so students have opportunities for greater integration of the material and a more comprehensive understanding of the natural linkages among disciplines.

Themed Communities

This is the simplest form of the learning community, in which two courses are paired. Co-registration is encouraged, but not mandatory. Each course is taught separately, but there may be some joint assignments, projects and discussions. (example: It's Easy to be Green)

Linked Communities

This model is characterized by a group of 2-4 courses which are linked by common themes, historical periods, issues, or problems. Students co-enroll in the courses, and faculty collaborate to develop common assignments and projects. Faculty reinforce skills and concepts taught in the other classes. (Example: Debate Today's Issues with Tomorrow's Leaders and California History and Geography)

Coordinated Studies

This is considered the most "seamless" of all the LC models. This model is characterized by a multidisciplinary program of study involving a cohort of students and faculty drawn from different disciplines. Faculty plan and participate in all parts of the program. Courses are integrated into a "block" around a central theme. There is generally no distinction among discrete courses. (Example: On With The Show. In English?, Success in Algebra)

Resources: <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ilc/models.html> and <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ilc/monograph/>



Frequently Asked Questions by Faculty

Q: Will I get paid for the time that I spend working on my learning community.

Faculty in new learning communities, or faculty who are new to a previously existing learning community, will receive a \$500 stipend. In order to receive this stipend, you will need to submit the document, “Creating an Ohlone College Learning Community,” by the third week of classes.

Any full-time faculty who collaborate to develop team-taught lessons within a learning community may be eligible to receive flex credit. Flex credit will be awarded to the instructor(s) teaching the lesson in their non-assigned class(es). A total of 4 hours of flex may be received for this type of activity each semester. An Individual Flex Proposal and Report Form needs to be completed, approved, and signed by your Dean before it is submitted to the Professional Development Coordinator. It may be possible for part-time faculty to receive this benefit. Check with your Dean for further information.

Q: What if a student doesn't want to enroll in all of the learning community classes?

One major reason for participating in a learning community is to develop just that: a community for learning. If a student is not involved in all of the classes, he/she will miss out on this benefit. Therefore, in order to be a part of the learning community, students must sign up for all of the classes in a community, unless otherwise indicated.

Q: What if a student wants to drop one of the classes?

If a student wants to drop a class, the student will need to complete a drop form in Admissions and Records. Dropping a learning community course using WebAdvisor will result in the student being dropped from ALL the classes.

Q: What happens if my community doesn't fill?

If your community looks like it isn't going to fill, the courses will become unlinked to allow students to sign up for each class independently.



Additional Resources for Faculty

Online Articles:

“Assessment of Innovative Efforts: Lessons from the Learning Community Movement,” by Jean MacGregor, Vincent Tinto, and Jerri Holland Lindblad
<http://faculty.soe.syr.edu/vtinto/Files/Assessment%20of%20Innovation.pdf>

“Learning Communities and the Reconstruction of Remedial Education in Higher Education,” by Vincent Tinto
<http://www.doso.wayne.edu/SASS/Tinto%20Articles/Learning%20Communities%20&%20Remedial%20Education.pdf>

“Learning Communities in Higher Education: A Field Observation Study,” by Jane Weber
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/95/c6.pdf

“Impact of Learning Communities for Under-Prepared Students,” by Cathy Engstrom
http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/conf_achgap_cc_engstrom.pdf

Monographs (available through Learning Communities Coordinator):

Learning Communities in Community Colleges

The Pedagogy of Possibilities: Developmental Education, College-Level Studies, and Learning Communities

Online Resources:

Integrated Learning Communities
<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ilc/monograph/>

Integrated Learning Garden
<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ilc/>

Learning Communities Bibliography (PDF)
http://www.temple.edu/vpus/programs_initiatives/lc/documents/lcbibliography.pdf

The Washington Center
Learning Communities National Resource Center
<http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/project.asp?pid=73>