

Learning Community Handbook
2016-2017
First-Year Experience

Learning Communities

Learning communities (LCs) are intentional, high impact practices that encourage integration of learning across courses. At their best, LCs practice pedagogies of active engagement and reflection. As students take linked or clustered classes together, they participate in an intentional restructuring of time, credit, and learning experiences. To build community, enhance learning, and foster connections, faculty guide students through curriculum and learning opportunities that focus on “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Interdisciplinary content and intentional collaboration among faculty provide students a high impact learning experience.

LCs explore a common topic and/or common readings throughout the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses;” while others feature extracurricular opportunities for students, such as service learning. The type and structure depend on the goals and theme of the community.

Kuh, G. (2008). High-Impact educational practices: What they Are, who has Access to them, and why they matter. Association of American Colleges & Universities, Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>

Smith, B., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. & Gabelnick, F. (2004). Learning communities: Reforming undergraduate education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Living-Learning Community

A living-learning community (LLC) includes a cohort of students that live and learn together. Students live in a designated area and work closely with student staff. LLCs combine high impact practices, which often result in greater in-class engagement and increased student retention. Students, faculty, and staff work closely to coordinate, plan, and implement a program with learning opportunities for students that go beyond the classroom. In LLCs, students and student staff engage in discussion groups, off-campus experiences, and other extracurricular activities.

Benefits

Student Benefits

- Students participating in LCs or LLCs are more likely to:
- Complete their first year of college and return for a second year
- Complete core course work on-time or early
- Create a satisfying and full course schedule
- Meet faculty and other students with similar interests

- Build relationships with faculty in their major
- Register early for spring courses
- Receive consistent support from program faculty and staff
- Participate in extracurricular learning experiences
- Access other campus resources
- Feel supported through their transition to college
- Receive quality academic advising

Faculty & Staff Benefits

- Faculty and staff participating in LCs or LLCs:
- Engage with first-year students who are interested in a particular topic
- Foster intellectual curiosity
- Integrate curriculum with colleagues across campus
- Use LCs as a tool to introduce students curriculum
- Increase student retention in a particular major or college
- Access financial resources (from FYE) to support programs, trips, and/or professional development
- Earn \$1500 in direct compensation

Learning Community Development

While learning community (LC) coordinators typically propose LCs, any university faculty or staff can submit a proposal. Faculty and staff interested in proposing a learning community should consider the steps below and submit the attached proposal. **LC proposals for Fall 2016, will be due January 15, 2016.**

Pre-Implementation

Establish the need.

Identifying a need is the first step in planning a learning community. Student learning and increased enrollment is often the catalyst for a new learning community, however, there are as many reasons to develop a LC as there are benefits to interdisciplinary and collaborative learning and teaching. When faculty, staff, and administrators share a concern for a particular population of students, specialized curriculum in the form of a LC can result in increased student learning and retention.

Consider interdisciplinary learning.

Once a need has been identified, consider the type of community that will best meet the students' needs. Consider the courses students will take as well as the faculty and/or staff you

want to include in the community. Will faculty come from the same college or will connections be made across the university? Will syllabi be common, linked, or discrete?

Learning Community Creation

Speak with your colleagues.

It is necessary to have the approval of your department head and dean before committing to implementing a LC, since your course load will be affected. Once your proposal has been approved by a department head and dean, contact other faculty with whom you would like to work. Your dean, department chair, and colleagues in First-Year Experience may help you find faculty interested in working with learning communities. At this point in the process (and at any other) you can reach out to Melissa Grosso in First-Year Experience for discuss logistics.

Furthermore, this is an excellent time to work with faculty from your department or other departments on campus. The LC coordinator has the opportunity to find faculty to teach courses included in the LC schedule. When faculty have agreed to participate, speak with Ashley Driver Taylor in FYE so she can match faculty with LC courses.

Develop a theme.

Once faculty have agreed to participate in your LC, consider the theme of your community and develop a title. A helpful resource in this stage is the LC Heruistic:

<http://www2.uwec.edu/CETL/bundles/upload/Designing-Integrated-Learning-for-Students.pdf>.

Examples of engaging titles and themes from recent communities include:

- Sustainable Cities
- College Culture Shock

Try to come up with a community name that would get students interested or excited to be a part of.

Submit a learning community proposal.

The coordinator of a potential LC must submit a proposal to Melissa Grosso in First-Year Experience in order for the proposal to be considered. Deadlines for LC proposals can be found on the First-Year Experience website as well as an email sent to all faculty and all staff.

Develop connections.

The most effective learning communities generate connections for students and faculty across disciplines and divisions. Consider your community's theme, the target population, and the resources available to assist you in implementing an effective LC. Consider meeting with individuals in the following areas as they can enhance your students' experience in your LC:

- Career Services
- Center for Academic Success
- Advising Center
- Center for Teaching and Learning

Develop a Common Syllabus.

All LCs must develop a syllabus with shared policies, integrated assignments, and coordinated due dates. The type of community will determine whether syllabi should be created for seminar courses only (XIDS 2002 or UWG 1101) or as a common syllabus for linked courses. The syllabus should also include the times, hours, and contact information for any support services linked to the LC.

Determine an experiential learning component.

LC coordinators have resources available to help fund projects and field trips. In order to receive funding, contact Melissa Grosso in First-Year Experience with a request for funding.

Advertise.

All LCs will be listed on First-Year Experience's website, as well as a promotional flyer given to all new students. Additionally, students have the opportunity to choose an LC during orientation sign-up. You may find it helpful, however, to advertise your learning community in the following ways:

- During preview day
- During scholarship day
- On your department and/or college's website
- Mailers to potential students

Timeline

November 2015 – December 2015

- Speak with your dean about implementing a LC
- Call for proposals sent to faculty and staff on November 25, 2015

January 2016

- Proposals due to Melissa Grosso in FYE on or before January 15, 2016
- Learning Community Committee meets to approve 2016-2017 proposals

February 2016

- FYE sends class confirmations to LC coordinators
- February 16, 2015 is the last day to change classes within the learning communities.

March 2016-July 2017

- FYE reserves seats and generates spreadsheet with new CRNs for Fall 2016 courses.
- FYE releases unused seats July 1, 2016

August 2016

- Learning Community Orientation (Monday, August 8th)

September 2016

- Map-Works Survey

October 2016

- LC coordinators encourage students to be advised
- LC coordinators contact FYE to schedule a time for students to register for classes

November 2016

- FYE and LC coordinator register students for Spring 2017 courses
- Students participate in Experiential Learning Opportunity if not already completed

December 2016

- Release unused spring seats on December 1, 2016

Appendix A

Learning Community Coordinator: The learning community coordinator is a faculty or staff member who initiates and/or organizes LC coordinated events including, but not limited to fall and spring semester courses and a field trip. LC coordinators also approve course changes when necessary and monitor student progress.

Academic Focus: Learning communities can be focused on a major (eg: Music, Creative Writing), a cluster of majors (eg: Pre-engineering, Business), or a shared interest (eg: Sustainable Cities).

Type of Learning Community: Are you proposing a learning community or a living learning community?

Population: Please identify potential groups of students to whom marketing can be targeted for this learning community. Target groups might be connected to a specific major or degree or to a shared interest. *Please include all prerequisites (i.e. two years of Spanish or 26 ACT Math) in this section, as well.*

Courses: Please identify at least two fall courses and two spring courses for co-enrollment. You may identify more possibilities; list them in order of preference.

Learning communities are anchored by an XIDS course. Typically, XIDS 2001 or 2002 (i.e. *What do you know about...*) is taught in the fall and by the LC coordinator. Please note that if you are proposing a new learning community, you may need approval for the new XIDS course. It is best to seek approval for your XIDS course after the LC has been approved. For more information about XIDS course approval, please contact Andy Walter awalter@westga.edu

Size: In the past, communities were limited to 24 members because of ENGL 1101 and 1102 seat requirements, however, since ENGL 1101 and 1102 are not mandatory courses, the size of the community is flexible. Consider the type of courses offered. Is there a limit to the number of students in a seminar course that you should consider?

Experiential Learning: Going beyond the classroom is an opportunity that makes LC unique. Ideally, each LC will have an off campus field trip which allows students to experience their academic focus in a “real world” setting, often by touring a relevant business or organization, meeting with alumni, etc. Last year Dr. Walter took his students to Atlanta where they visited environmental justice activists and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance at the Outdoor Activity Center. There they saw a hydroponic garden and discussed the impact of sustainable cities on the community. FYE offers \$500 to fund your field trip.

Proposed Names: Please suggest two or three possible names for your LC. The name of the community is an important tool when recruiting prospective students. Names should clearly

and directly convey the purpose of the community, any department/college affiliations, and distinguish it from other existing LCs.

Approval: Approval from your department chair and dean are necessary.

Appendix B

2016-2017 Learning Community Proposal Form

Learning Community Coordinator:

Department:

Date:

Email:

Phone:

Important information

The deadline to complete the Learning Community Proposal Form with the required signatures is January 15, 2016. Please have your forms returned to the following location and person by this date:

Melissa Grosso
First-Year Experience Office
211 Strozier Hall
mgrosso@westga.edu
678-839-4966

Description of the Learning Community

(Include the target population for the learning community, the focus of your community and the type of community you are proposing.)

Please also include a description of your learning community (50 words or less) that will be put on Banner to advertise your community to first year students.

How many students can this LC accommodate?

Classes requested
Fall 2016 Semester

Course	Instructor	Contact: Y/N
*Minimum of 2 Courses	*Desired Faculty	Have you spoken to this person about teaching in your LC?

Spring 2017 Semester

Course	Instructor	Contact: Y/N
*Minimum of 2 Courses	*Desired Faculty	Have you spoken to this person about teaching in your LC?

What other faculty and staff do you anticipating collaborating with during your facilitation of this LC?

Experiential Learning

Learning community may request financial support from the First Year Experience office to fund programs and events that will enhance the experience of learning community students. Please describe how you intend to use any requested funds below. Funding can be spent on supplies and equipment, travel, and advertisement/marketing. Please include a summary of items requested and how the money will be spent. Total amount requested (max \$500):

Signatures

*I support this Learning Community and have seen the following document.

Requested by: (Learning Community Coordinator)

Date

Department Chair

Date

Dean of College

Date