ABSTRACT: Although learning communities date back to the 1920s, the modern resurgence of learning communities began in the 1980s. By 2000, more than five hundred institutions offered learning communities; by 2007, 30% of first-year students at doctoral-extensive and master's institutions were enrolled in a learning community. Studies have shown that when done well, learning communities can make a critical difference in student success, especially for some minority and underprepared populations. Despite the growth in learning communities, they have remained an "add-on" component rather than being fully integrated into the curriculum and structure of the institution. In addition, institutional goals and assessments of learning communities (retention, transition to college) are not always the same as the broader educational objectives of learning communities (academic inquiry, integrated knowledge). Learning communities have not yet scaled up to the level where they transform the structure of the university. This paper looks at the entwined history of learning communities, general education, and liberal education; the current data on learning community effectiveness; the challenges now facing learning communities; and the possible future evolution of learning communities.
Example 1: A Brief History of Learning Communities

Alexander Mieklejohn
1872-1964

Experimental College
1927-1932
University of Wisconsin

John Dewey
1859-1952

Joseph Tussman
Berkeley LC
1965-1969

Mervyn Cadwallader
San Jose State University LC
1965-1969

Meiklejohn’s philosophy student from UW

Tussman married to Cadwallader’s cousin, introduced Cadwallader to Meiklejohn

Cadwallader
SUNY – Old Westbury LC
1969-1970

Patrick Hill
SUNY – Stony Brook LC
1976—

Roberta Matthews
LaGuardia Community College LC
1974—

Evergreen State University (1969)
Cadwallader (Dean, 1970) et al
Hill (appointed Provost 1983)

Joint presentations on LC’s for both research universities and community colleges expanded the audience for LC’s

• Integrity in the Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community (1985)
• Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education (Evergreen State University, Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean MacGregor, 1985)

1994: LC’s on 34 campuses in Washington state
Mid-1990s: Tinto’s et al research on LC’s; Astin’s What Matters in College
2000: 500+ institutions have LC’s
2007: 30% of 1st-year students in LC’s (NSSE, doctoral and MA)
Example 2: Learning Community Models\textsuperscript{1}

1) Learning Communities within Courses that Are Unmodified

Common courses with LC cohort shaded

Freshman seminar/interest group or integrative seminar/colloquy

2) Learning communities of linked or clustered classes

Pure cohorts

Linked courses

Integrative seminar

Small course(s) linked to larger course(s)

3) Team-taught learning communities

Common syllabus

\textsuperscript{1} This categorization is based on Barbara Leigh Smith, Jean MacGregor, Roberta Matthews, and Faith Gabelnick, \textit{Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), pp. 70-89.
### Example 3: Learning Community Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Effects²</th>
<th>Impact on Underserved Students</th>
<th>Moderating Variables</th>
<th>Research Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Higher grades</td>
<td>• Higher grades</td>
<td>• Variability of learning community formulation/type (residential, non-residential, linked courses, etc.)</td>
<td>• Predominance of single-institution studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher persistence rates</td>
<td>• Higher persistence rates</td>
<td>• Degree of faculty and student interaction</td>
<td>• Variability of learning community formulation/type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ease of college transition</td>
<td>• Ease of college transition</td>
<td>• Classroom environment (positive, negative mixed)</td>
<td>• Lack of specificity about learning community elements to make comparisons between formulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher levels of academic engagement</td>
<td>• Greater interaction with faculty and peers</td>
<td>• Helps build identity as learner/recognize academic potential</td>
<td>• Short-term nature of most research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater interaction with faculty and peers</td>
<td>• Helps build identity as learner/recognize academic potential</td>
<td>• Sense of belonging</td>
<td>• Reliance on self-reported data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perception of campus as more supportive</td>
<td>• Gains for intellectual development</td>
<td>• Gains for intellectual development</td>
<td>• Examinations of outcomes for specific populations rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-report of critical thinking gains</td>
<td>• Gains for intellectual development</td>
<td>• Higher levels of integrative thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gains for intellectual development</td>
<td>• Gains for intellectual development</td>
<td>• Higher levels of integrative thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher levels of integrative thinking</td>
<td>• Gains in writing and reading skills</td>
<td>• Gains in writing and reading skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gains in writing and reading skills</td>
<td>• Greater appreciation for and engagement with diversity/different viewpoints</td>
<td>• Greater appreciation for and engagement with diversity/different viewpoints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater appreciation for and engagement with diversity/different viewpoints</td>
<td>• Higher rates of civic engagement</td>
<td>• Higher rates of civic engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 4: General Education and Learning Community Practices and Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Communities</th>
<th>Liberal Education</th>
<th>General Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster sense of community and shared purposed among learners and their teachers</td>
<td>Make a commitment to multiculturalism</td>
<td>Making a successful adjustment to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create curricular coherence and connections among courses and ideas; intentional integration</td>
<td><strong>Elevate general education and integration rather than specialization</strong></td>
<td>Learning and honing academic skills in writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning critical thinking, and technological and information literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach skills in a meaningful context</td>
<td>Promote the commonweal and citizenship</td>
<td>Developing the academic maturity needed to undertake study in the major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop students' capacity for social and academic connections</td>
<td>Regard all levels of education as belonging to a common enterprise and working together</td>
<td>Establishing patterns of academic effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-curricular experiences</td>
<td>Re-conceive the purpose of teaching as stimulating learning and inquiry</td>
<td>Attaining breadth of knowledge that is meaningful and lasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create autonomous and independent learners</td>
<td>Promote the formation of values and the practice of service</td>
<td>Gaining content knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Employ assessment</td>
<td>Exploring possible majors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining civic sensibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and Assessment</td>
<td><strong>Gaining integrative abilities</strong></td>
<td>Developing values, ethical thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 5: Typical Institutional Goals for Learning Communities

- To adjust to college
- Create learning-based peer networks
- Improve the academic success of first-year students
- Improve student retention from the freshman to sophomore year
- Increase student satisfaction with the university
- Increase student-faculty interaction outside the classroom
- To develop and grow personally
- To explore career development

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Representative Bibliography


_____. *How We Think.* Lexington, MA: Heath, 1933.


Tinto, Vincent and A. Goodsell, "A Longitudinal Study of Freshman Interest Groups at the University of Washington." A Study by the National Center for Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment, University Park: Penn State University, 1993.
