

# Lane's Fast Lane to Success Learning Communities

Best Practices for Student Success  
in Action

Anne B. McGrail  
Learning Communities Coordinator

# What is Lane's First Year Experience and How is it Different From Fast Lanes to Success?

Fast Lanes to Success are one key component of Lane's first year experience (FYE) program.

In addition to access to courses, each student comes to Lane for the first time with many needs—they need to feel welcome, to get advice and be placed into the right class, to receive tutoring and supplemental instruction, and to access to co-curricular activities. These are all parts of a student's First Year Experience.

# Learning Communities Provide a Supportive Environment for New Students

Fast Lanes to Success learning communities are a part of a student's first year experience. Because learning communities are not required at Lane, one of the best ways to encourage students to experience the benefits of learning communities is to have them take one as soon as they arrive on campus. This is the logic of Fast Lanes to Success.

## Fast Lanes to Success: Part of Students' First Year Experience

For several years, Lane has been developing a comprehensive first year experience (FYE) for credit students. This experience has been designed based on national best practices for student success and retention. Fast Lanes to Success learning communities are just a part of this larger experience for students in their first year.

# Best Practices for Student Success

- First Year Experiences (peer mentors, learning communities, orientation, advising, ongoing mentoring with faculty and peers, etc.)
- Learning Communities (Fast Lanes to Success; Women in Transition; Beyond the Field: College Success for Athletes; Visualizing Success: College Success for Art Majors)
- A supportive learning environment and welcoming campus climate (e.g., SOAR, Fall Kickoff, Activities across campus sponsored by Student Life and Leadership)
- Appropriate Placement of Students/ Ensuring Preparedness
- Academic Advising (e.g., guided planning for academic and career goals)
- Supplemental Instruction (e.g., tutoring and extra time on task to support in-class learning)
- Early Warning and Intervention Systems (e.g., mid-term grades and counselor intervention before students get in over their heads or just quit.)

# A Place for Best Practices to Converge

All of these practices lead to improved rates of retention and success nationally. When community college students first come to college, many suffer from underpreparedness or social isolation that can come from living far from campus, or from working full time, or from being the only person they know in college. In addition, many students' busy lives leave little room for extra-curricular activities.

# A Place for Best Practices to Converge

Learning communities such as Fast Lanes to Success can remedy both the underpreparedness and the social isolation many students feel. The social bonding and close focus on academic success in Fast Lane have powerful effects: several studies by the National Learning Communities Project (Washington Center) show significantly higher retention, persistence, and graduation rates for students in learning communities than students in traditional courses. Lane's own pilot study has shown greater engagement and retention as well.

# Like all Learning Communities,

Fast Lanes to Success have many advantages for new students, including:

- Greater curricular coherence
- Intellectual engagement across disciplines—a focus on deep learning
- Institutional commitment to helping students achieve their goals.
- Contextualized learning—Gen Ed course faculty know what life skill students are working on in any given week, and can integrate this into their assignment/course design. Students can see how life skills are a part of any course they take in college.
- Classes designed to support the whole student. Students are encouraged to reflect on their life choices, their short-term and long-term goals, and to commit to small changes during the term that can have immediate effects on their motivation and success.

# The Curricular Design of Fast Lanes to Success

So far at Lane, the curricular design of Fast Lane to Success includes College Success and/or Effective Learning with a General Education required course (Math or Writing or Speech) or an introduction to the major (Art 199). College Success is offered for from 1-3 credits, with the other classes offering the same credits as stand-alone offerings. (There are other First Year Experience learning communities, such as Women in Transition, which include Career and Life Planning with Life Transitions.)

If you have an idea for a new Fast Lane, email Anne McGrail at [mcgraila@lanecc.edu](mailto:mcgraila@lanecc.edu)

# Best Practices in Action

One of the best things about the Fast Lanes to Success is the way that College Success classes provide direct opportunities for students to experience all the best practices for student success:

- students get to know one another early on, develop study groups and feel supported by each other;
- the class provides opportunities to meet with counselors and advisors in groups;
- as part of their coursework, students learn about and reflect on their grades early in the term while there is still time to attend to trouble spots;
- students take tours of the library and Tutor Central, and are encouraged to sign up for supplemental instruction and tutoring (Tutor Central's coordinator, Liz Coleman, is a College Success instructor!).

# An Integrated Curriculum

Like all learning communities, Fast Lanes to Success can counter the sense of fragmentation of the curriculum that new students may feel when they arrive on campus. Faculty from all Fast Lane classes refer to and reinforce learning from the linked classes—through activities, assignments, shared language, even shared projects—and so students start to integrate what they learn from each class and synthesize what they know. The deep learning that occurs in Fast Lanes to Success is knowledge of the self.

# A Sense of Belonging in the First Year

The learning community model of education has the potential to address several important obstacles to student success, offering as it does a relief from isolation, an inherent collaboration among faculty and students, and a built-in community of students who come to know each other through more time together. Many students who begin their career at Lane often go on to take other learning communities, where they engage in deep learning about the world while developing social bonds and a sense of community.

# Learn More about Fast Lanes to Success

To find out more about Fast Lanes to Success and all other learning communities at Lane, continue to browse the Faculty Resources page or the Course Offerings, or contact Anne McGrail, Learning Communities Coordinator, at [mcgraila@lanecc.edu](mailto:mcgraila@lanecc.edu).