

Planning for a Successful Learning Community

1. Brainstorming:

If you have an idea for a learning community, pursue your idea by thinking of one or two other disciplines that would lend themselves to co-exploration of this theme, question or goal. Contact faculty in that area and meet together to discuss your ideas. Explore together the answers to questions such as the students who would be served by your learning community, prerequisites that might be required, scheduling issues, etc. At Lane, we provide 5 hours total of curriculum development for faculty to meet and flesh out their ideas for this stage.

2. Initial Planning.

At this stage, it's time to really think through your ideas. Time to consider questions about the design of your LC. Think of how your LC will differ from the traditional curriculum and how this difference will benefit students. Plan which classes will be offered and what activities you will include that will help the classes "bond" with each other.

At Lane the most successful learning communities

- Are often designed with existing courses that meet degree requirements or that support other student goals.
- Demonstrate curricular coherence; courses reinforce and/or integrate ideas
- Are ideally "pure cohorts" in which all students in one course are registered for at least one other course in the learning community. This creates cross-fertilization of ideas and the best community building. However, successful learning communities have involved one "anchor" course and "satellite" courses linked to it.
- Involve ideas which cross subject-matter boundaries
- Facilitate the move toward a richer, learning-centered environment
- Involve active and collaborative learning
- Explore and develop understanding of diverse perspectives
- Aid student retention and progress toward academic success
- Support faculty development
- Allow students to see faculty as learners—team teaching is encouraged!

3. Bringing your ideas to Fruition.

Working with one or more other faculty takes coordination and communication. Be sure you plan enough time to consider all the issues involved in starting something new:

Come to the Learning Communities Leadership Team (LCLT) for advice and support.

The LCLT has been developing and supporting learning communities for more than a decade, and each member has a passion for this form of education. We have watched successful LCs grow and helped struggling ones continue. Come to a meeting and talk about your dreams for your LC. We are here to offer our support and advice and encouragement, and to help you avoid institutional obstacles to success. Email Anne McGrail at mcgraila@lanecc.edu

Think about what kind of curricular coordination you're most interested in.

Will you be linking your activities? Will all the students be in both classes? Will you be developing a seamless course? Check out the document "Choosing a Framework for Your Integration" on the Faculty Resources Page.

Will you have a web or moodle presence for the LC?

Who will develop/maintain it and who has access to it?

Publicity and resources:

Think about the resources you will need for your LC. What kind of registration support, including publicity, will you need? Is there a student pool out there who would benefit from taking these courses? How will you reach these students to fill your enrollments?

Cohorts.

Will you have "pure cohorts" or "mixed cohorts"? If your enrollment doesn't meet expectations, how will you handle the change? Be sure to talk with your division dean and/or lead faculty and/or administrative coordinator to plan around the issue of enrollments. Learning Communities cannot support a low-enrolled class, although we encourage divisions to be flexible when they can.

Synchronize your syllabi:

In order to take advantage of the learning opportunities that cross-disciplinary work presents, faculty should map out your entire course, week by week, so that each of you knows what the students are learning in the other class and can reinforce that learning through your own disciplinary work that same week.

Promotion:

Take advantage of the various means available on your campus to promote your LC: Discussion with academic advisor for information about potential students; Announcements in classes; Distribution of flyers/posters; Preparation of material for annual/term schedules; Development of web page. At Lane, new LCs receive \$150.00 promotional budget for posters, etc., so this is a ball-park figure for your first time.

Administrative Approval Process:

It's essential to work from the beginning of your process with your chair, administrative coordinator, and counselors/advisors to ensure that your classes will fill and meet students' academic planning needs. Be sure to consider contract issues for faculty, including maximum credit limit and how to work within any other budgetary constraints.

Time Management:

Learning Communities are time-consuming, especially when you are first planning them. At Lane, new learning communities are supported with 70 hours of CD per faculty member, although faculty often spend more time than that the first time they teach the LC. Different activities include: Course planning; planning meetings; attending cohort classes; special activities (e.g., field trips, capstone events, etc.).