# Learning Communities

## Definition

Learning communities combine two or more courses, and this restructuring of the curriculum provides both students and faculty unique opportunities to add greater coherence and relevance to course materials and to sponsor greater interaction among students and between faculty and students.

## Research

"When these learning communities are carefully planned and implemented, they can have a dramatic and positive effect on students. Unlike some educational trends that appear promising but lack resiliency, learning communities have proven to be effective across a variety of types of institutions and in a variety of different forms." (Otto, Evins, Boyer-Pennington, and Brinthaupt, 2015)

"In the introductory chapter to Diversity, Educational Equity, and Learning Communities, Lardner (2005) describes the importance of intentionality in creating effective learning communities. Citing Malnarich's (2003) earlier work, Lardner emphasizes that learning communities can be used to target the problematic parts of the curriculum—those gateway courses and 'graveyard' courses that act as gatekeepers for student progress. By creating learning communities that lend support to students in the classes where there is a higher risk of failure, rather than creating communities based solely on faculty's personal interests in collaborative teaching, institutions can address issues of equity and access." (Brownell and Swaner, 2009)

"Valencia College has continued to utilize [Learning in Community (LinC)] courses and expand the offerings because the data continues to show LinC courses as an important strategy to increase student course success (course success defined as earning a grade of "C" or better), particularly for Hispanic and African-American students. Other quantitative measures include ... lower course withdrawal rates ...." (Brighton and Phelps, 2012)

## Examples

- First-year/semester courses (ENG/RDG/CPD)
- Contextualize Learning (RDG/NUR)
- Thematic:  Renaissance through Contemporary Art (ARH102) and Ideas and Values in the Humanities (HUM251)
- Fully-integrated and Loosely-linked

## Implementation Ideas

If you could have the perfect pairing of your course with another, what would you pick? What other courses might make good pairings?

What model of integration might be ideal?

Looking ahead to Guided Pathways, how might you imagine learning communities?

## References

Brighton, R., & Phelps, J. M. (2012, March 15). Learning communities: more to it than just pairing courses. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *29*(3), 22. Retrieved from http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A284221661/AONE?u=mcc_glendale&sid=AONE&xid=988d6336

Brownell, J. E., & Swaner, L. E. (2009). High-Impact Practices: Applying the Learning Outcomes Literature to the Development of Successful Campus Programs. *Peer Review*, *11*(2), 26–30. Retrieved from http://libproxy.gc.maricopa.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=41522329&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Otto, S., Evins, M. A., Boyer-Pennington, M., & Brinthaupt, T. M. (2015). Learning communities in higher education: Best practices. *Journal of Student Success & Retention*, 2(1). Retrieved from http://www.jossr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Learning-Communities-in-Higher-Education-JoSSR-submission-revised-10-26-2015.pdf