Learning Community Models

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What Matters in College?

- Student - Student interaction
- Student - Faculty interaction
- Student oriented faculty
- Discussing racial/ethnic issues with other students
- Hours studying
- Tutoring other students
- Socializing with diverse students
- Student body with high socioeconomic status
- Institutional emphasis on diversity
- Faculty positive about general education
- Students value altruism and social activism

Astin, A. W. *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited.* 1993.

Factors Negatively Associated with Positive Student Outcomes

- Hours spent watching television
- Institutional size
- Use of teaching assistants
- Full-time employment
- Lack of community among students
- Living at home
- Participating in inter-collegiate athletics
- Peers oriented toward materialism

Astin, A. W. *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited.* 1993.

Recent Trends in Educational Reform Efforts

- Moves from student-centered to learning-centered educational thrust
- Embraces disciplinary and multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Includes a variety of ways of constructing and demonstrating meaning and understanding
- Fosters a collaborative learning environment
- Increases emphasis on active and collaborative learning
- Incorporates rationally-based and values-based knowledge
- Encourages civic and service components in educational agenda

Learning Communities

A variety of approaches that link or cluster classes during a given term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, that enroll a common cohort of students. This represents an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, and to foster more explicit connections among students, among students and their teachers, and among disciplines.

From Courses

Usually, teachers teach separate courses to separate sets of students

Teacher A

Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
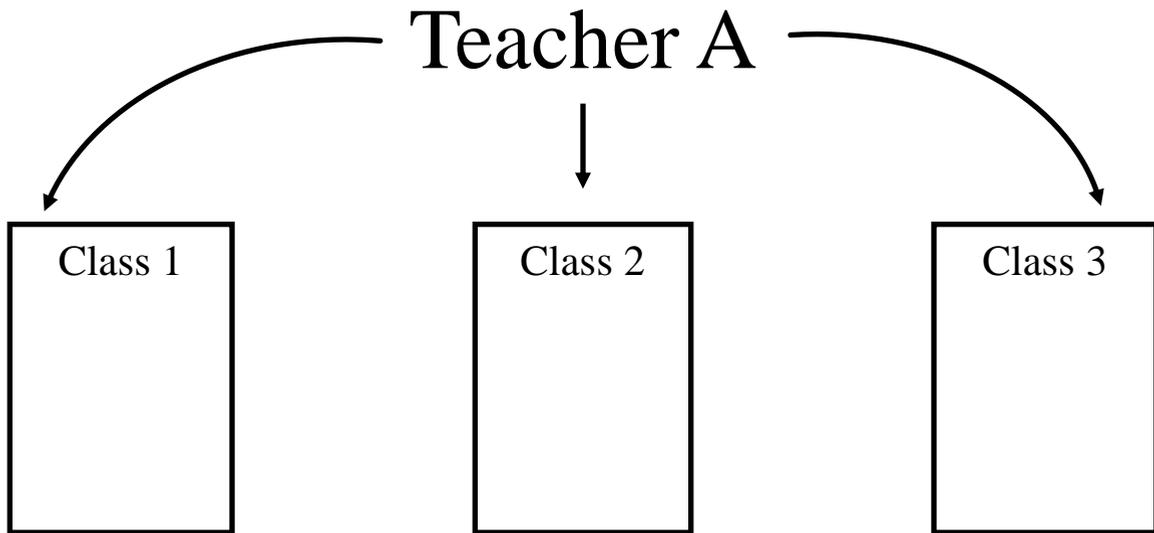
and students experience their
separate courses in unrelated fragments

Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
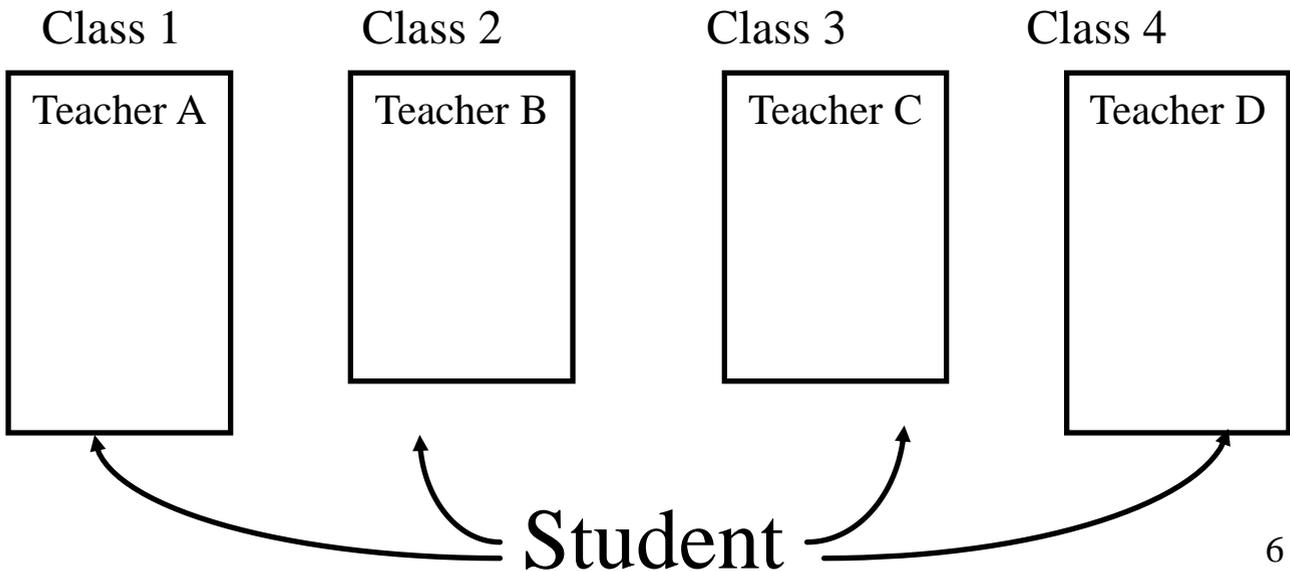
Student

To Programs

By intentionally pairing or clustering courses into **programs,** both teachers and students experience a more coherent and enriched teaching and learning environment.

Teacher A   Teacher B

Class 1   Class 2
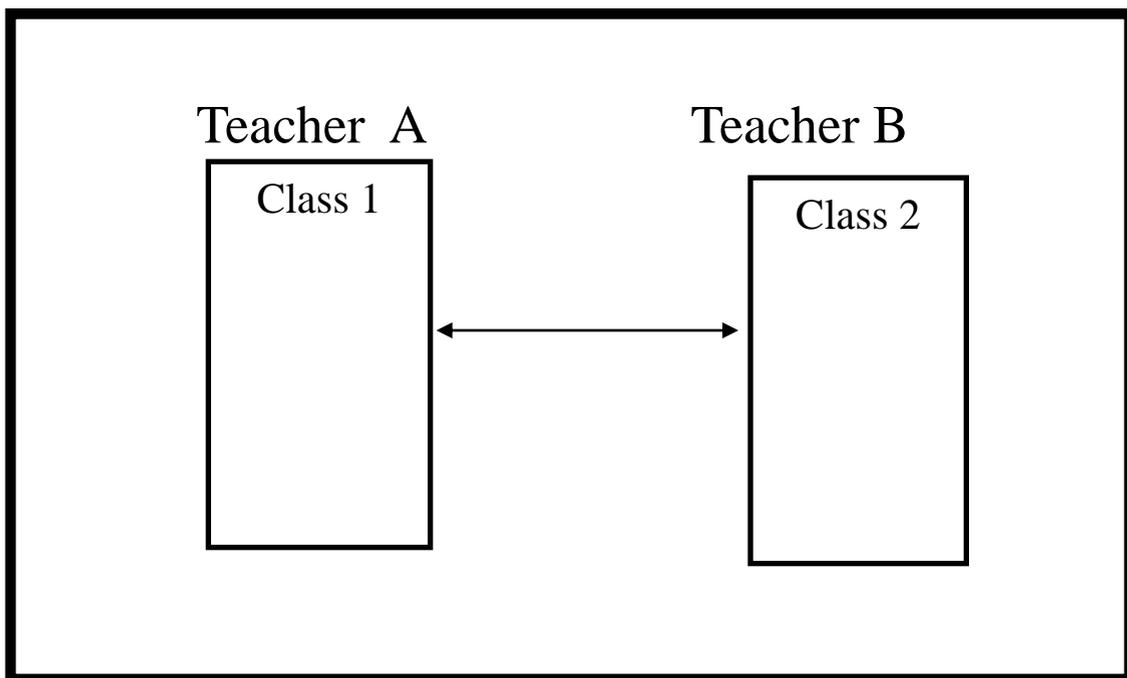
Effective Learning Communities

Effective Learning Communities have a number of distinctive features:

- They are usually smaller than most other units on campus.

- They have a sense of purpose.

- They help overcome the isolation of faculty members from one another and from their students.

- They encourage faculty members to relate to one another both as specialists and as educators. (In effect this encourages the development of new faculty roles.)

- They encourage continuity and integration in the curriculum.

- They help build a sense of group identity, cohesion, and "specialness."

Source: *Involvement in Learning,* 1984.

Learning Communities Address the Needs for:

- Greater intellectual interaction
    - student ⟷ student
    - student ⟷ faculty
    - faculty ⟷ faculty
- Curricular coherence: reinforcement and/or integration of ideas
- Understanding issues which cross subject matter boundaries
- Ways to facilitate the move toward a richer, learning-centered environment
- Active and collaborative learning
- Exploring and understanding diverse perspectives
- Student retention and progress toward degree
- Faculty development
- Low-cost methods for doing the above

Learning Communities Invite an Array of Pedagogical Approaches:

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Collaborative/
Cooperative Learning

Peer Teaching

Discussion Groups &
Seminars

Experiential Learning

Labs and Field Trips

Problem-Centered
Learning

Lectures and
Demonstrations

Writing and Speaking
Across-the-Curriculum

Ongoing Reflection,
Metacognitive Activities,
Self-evaluation
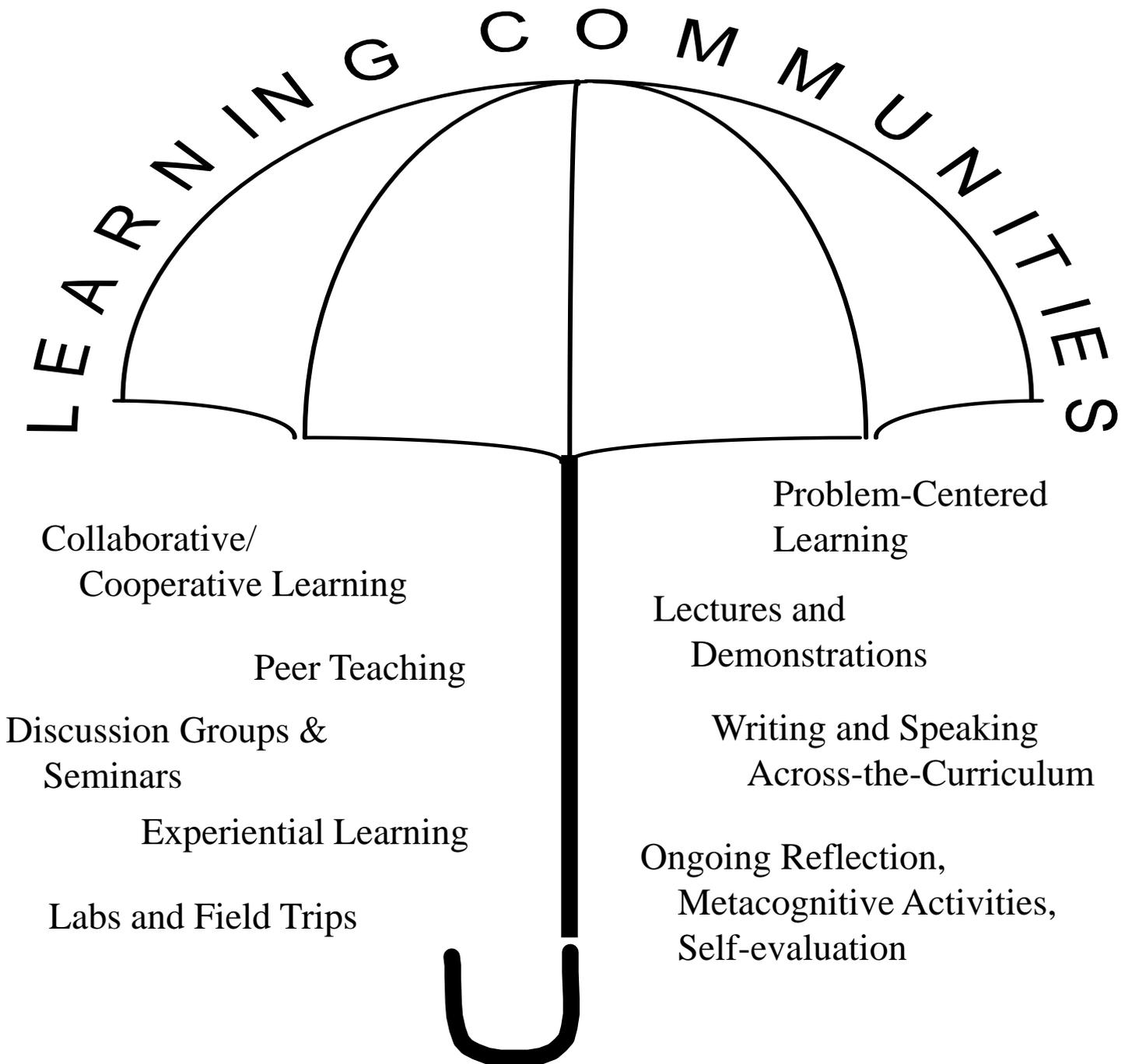
Learning Communities are Found in:

- Developmental studies
- Freshmen/First Year initiatives
- Strategies for coherence in general education
- Writing programs: teaching writing in the context of a subject or an interdisciplinary theme
- Study in a minor (Women's Studies, Environmental Studies)
- Study in the major
- Graduate school programs

Others may who participate in LC teaching teams besides faculty members:

- Learning support specialists
- Academic advisors
- Residence life staff
- Librarians
- Computer technology specialists
- Students! Both undergraduate and graduate students frequently serve as teachers, peer advisors and facilitators

Learning Communities Can Be Structured As:

Programs in which a small cohort of students enrolls in larger classes that faculty DO NOT coordinate. Intellectual connections and community- building often take place in an additional integrative seminar.
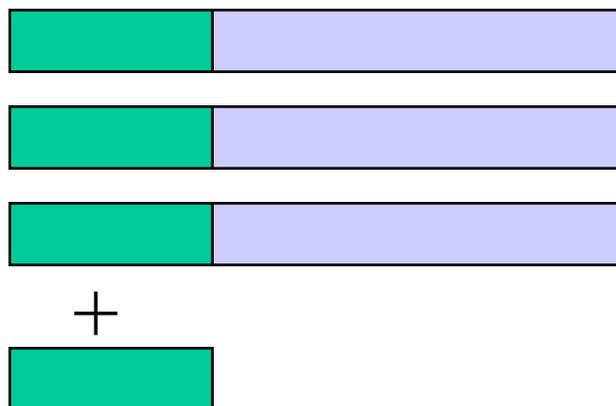
Programs of two or more classes linked thematically or by content, which a cohort of students takes together. The faculty DO plan the program collaboratively.

Programs of coursework that faculty members team-teach. The course work is embedded in an integrated program of study.

shading represents the student cohort

"F.I.G.'s" Freshman Interest Groups

Goal: The creation of small effective academic learning communities in a large college setting.

Vehicle: Triads of courses offered around an area of interest, an interdisciplinary topic, or courses related to a specific major. Each F.I.G. has a peer advisor, a more advanced student who convenes the group weekly to form study groups, to learn about campus resources, and to plan social gatherings.

Pre-Law

F.I.G.

American Government

+

Intro. to Philosophy: Ethics

+

Fundamentals of Public Speaking

+

F.I.G. Discussion Group

Examples of F.I.G.'s

THE AMERICAN STATE   Introduction to Politics
Survey - U.S. History
Interdisciplinary Writing
F.I.G. Discussion Group

THE SPECTRUM OF   Psychology as a Natural Science
  BEHAVIOR   Intro. to Anthropology
Composition: Social Issues
F.I.G. Discussion Group

PRE-ENGINEERING   Psychology w/Analytic Geometry
General Chemistry
Composition: Exposition
Engineering Careers
F.I.G. Discussion Group

Variation on F.I.G.'s:

Interest Groups in the Major

The University of Washington has developed Transfer Interest Groups, to build coherence and community for transfer students in large university departments. The peer advisor is a graduate teaching assistant.

Sociology
Transfer
Interest
Group

SOC 352: The Family

+

SOC 450: Political Economy of Women and Family in the 3rd World

+

SOC 499: Sociology Interest Group Seminar

Linked or Paired Courses

Goal: Curricular coherence and integrating skill and content teaching

- Two courses for which students co-register.
- Generally, faculty work to coordinate syllabi and assignments, but teach their classes separately.
- Often, a writing or speech course is linked to a lecture-centered course, or a mathematics course is linked to a science course.

Examples of Paired Courses

Introduction to Public Speaking

American History

Beginning Calculus

College Physics

College Study Skills

Introductory Biology

Technical Writing

Intro. to Environmental Science

Women and Fiction

Philosophy: Ethics

A developmental linked class structure at De Anza College

Our Times and Our Lives
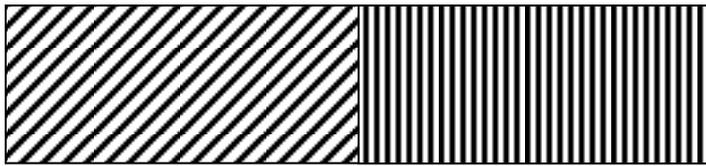
9 units

Contemporary Literature
4 units
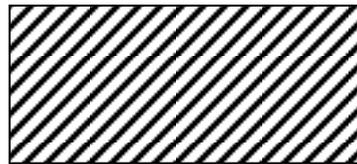
50 students

Preparatory Reading & Writing Skills (Section A)
5 units
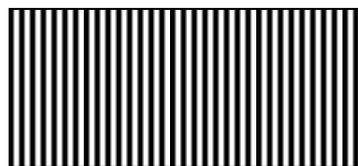
25 students

Preparatory Reading & Writing Skills (Section B)
5 units

25 students

Literature	9:30-10:20 Monday through Thursday
Reading & Writing (A)	10:30-11:20 Monday through Friday
Reading & Writing (B)	11:30-12:20 Monday through Friday

Learning Clusters:

Goal: Coherence, thinking and writing skills in a community setting

## LaGuardia Community College

- All day-time enrolled students in Liberal Arts AA Programs take one of these 12-credit clusters.
- Cluster enrollment is limited to 30 students. Students travel from class to class as a self-contained group.

```
┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│        English 101 (3 credits)             │
│                 +                           │
│   Writing the Research Paper (2 credits)   │
│                 +                           │
│        Integrated Hour (1 credit)          │
└────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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"Freedom and Seeing"   OR   "Work, Labor and Business in American Life"

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┌──────────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Intro. to Philosophy (3 credits) │  │ Intro. to Social Sci. (3 credits) │
│              +               │    │              +               │
│   Intro. to Art (3 credits)  │    │  Work, Labor & Business in   │
│                              │    │   American Lit. (3 credits)  │
└──────────────────────────────┘    └──────────────────────────────┘
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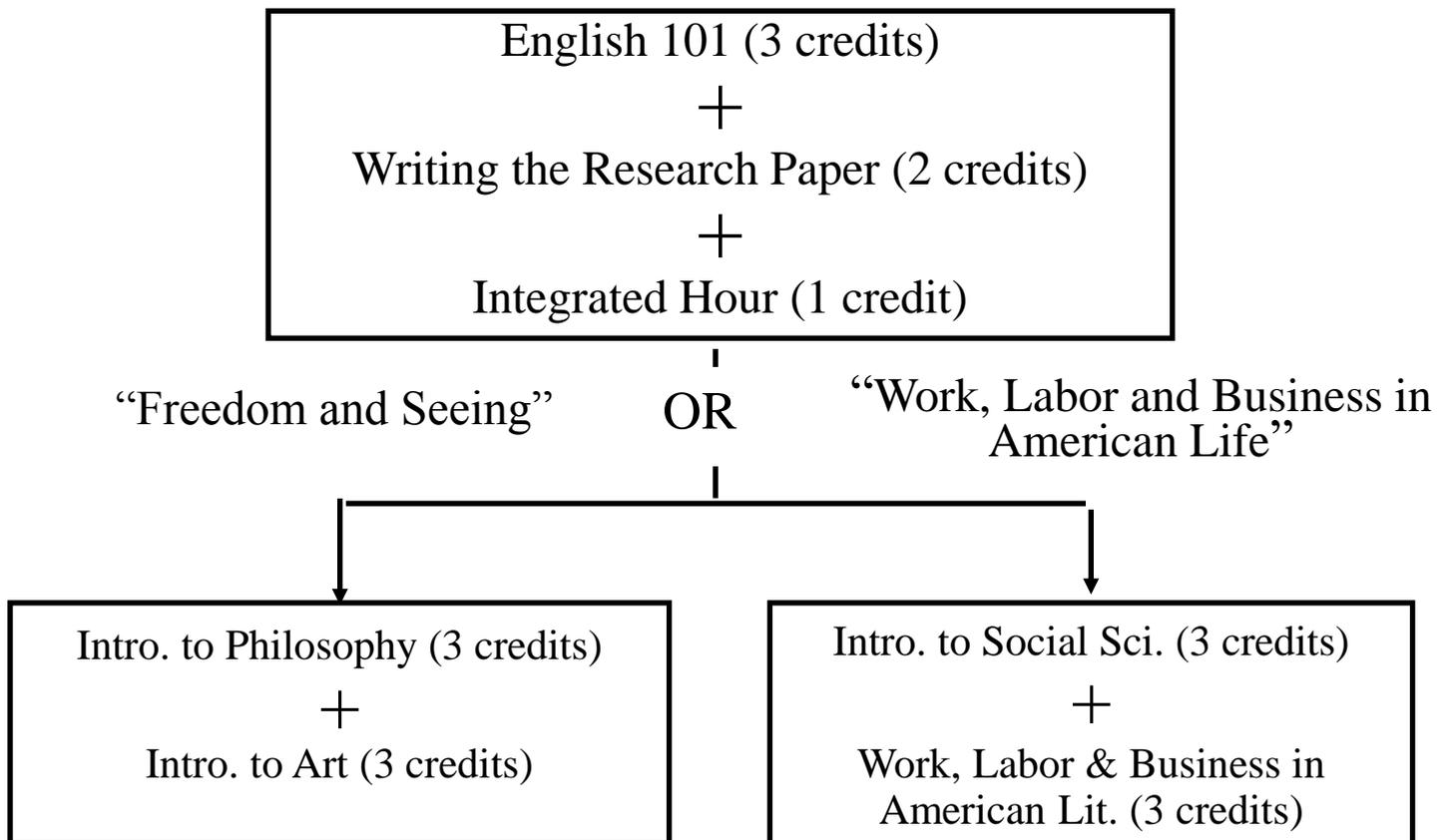
A Learning Cluster Schedule:

Work, Labor and Business in American Society

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	9:20-11:50 Work, Labor & Business in Amer. Lit.			
10:40-11:50 Research Paper		10:40-11:50 Research Paper	9:40-11:50 Work, Labor & Business in Amer. Lit.	
12:00-1:10 Composition		12:00-1:10 Integrated Hour	12:00-1:10 Composition	
1:20-2:30 Intro. to Social Science		1:20-2:30 Intro. to Social Science	1:20-2:30 Intro. to Social Science	

Learning Cluster Procedures

LaGuardia Community College

Each spring faculty create cluster teams in consultation with and coordination with the Liberal Arts Chairperson and the Office for Academic Affairs

- Cluster Faculty Team Members
    - review "Cluster Principles"
    - review syllabi of previous clusters
    - share tentative thematic course outlines
    - discuss course descriptions, performance objectives
    - share intentions on text purchases
    - decide on avenues of communication
    - share term paper suggestions, teaching approaches, pedagogical ideas
    - exchange office hours and location, phone numbers
- Clusters are evaluated each quarter. The evaluations are shared with the cluster faculty and their chairs. Evaluations are centrally filed.

Course clusters:
Freshman Learning Communities at Georgia State University

- GOAL: formative, integrative academic experience for entering students in their first semester

- 30 Freshman LCs each fall, enrolling about 750 entering students

- Courses that fulfill state-wide core curriculum requirements and that address a common theme

- Course clusters are proposed by teams of faculty through an annual RFP process

Communication, Media and Society

Freshman Learning Community at Georgia State University

14 Semester Credits

* New Student Orientation - 3

* English Composition I - 3

• Film: History of the Motion Picture - 3

• Speech: Media, Culture and Society - 3

* Gender, Class and Ethnic Differences - 2

*In these small classes the learning community group is a "pure group."

Learning Community Initiative
Iowa State University

- LCs as a vehicle for institutional commitment to undergraduate education
- Strong partnership of student- and academic affairs
- Works within highly decentralized university structures
- Multiple models, developed by each college and individual departments in some cases
- 45 different LCs enroll about 2,000 students
- Student peer mentors a strong program feature
- Strong commitments to faculty development and assessment and peer mentors

Freshman LCs (mostly course clusters) in colleges of:

       Liberal Arts and Sciences
       Engineering
       Education
       Design
       Business
       Agriculture

New Student House
LaGuardia Community College

Basic Writing	4 hours + one supplemental hour in writing lab (no credit)
Basic Reading	4 hours + one supplementary hour in reading lab (no credit)
One college class	3 credits: in oral communications, level intro. To computers, creative drama, intro. To business - whatever works in terms of enrollment and faculty interest.
Freshman Seminar	1 credit - Usually taught by a counselor: Includes college orientation, study skills, test-taking skills, self-evaluation.

Each semester the "house" enrolls about 50 students, with two sections or "apartments" of about 25 students.

New Student ESL House
LaGuardia Community College

English as a Second Language	6 hours
Basic Reading	4 hours + one supplementary hour in reading lab (no credit)
One college-level class	3 credits: in oral communications .
Freshman Seminar	1 credit - Usually taught by a counselor: Includes college orientation, study skills, test-taking skills, self-evaluation.

The ESL "House" has three apartments: i.e. three sections of 25 students.

Team-Taught Learning Communities

Two, three or more courses fully team-taught as an integrated program.

Goals:

- More intensive student immersion in interrelated topics, a theme or question

- Faculty participating as *learners* as well as teachers

- The blurring of boundaries between disciplines or courses in favor of a larger whole

- The faculty development that emerges from collaboratively planning, delivering and reflecting on a coordinated program

Team-Taught Course Pairs

"Chemath"

┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│   Intro. Chemistry   │
│   │
│   Intermediate Algebra   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘

+

"Politics & the
Internet"

┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│   Computer Science   │
│   │
│   Political Science   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘

+

"Mexico: Facts &
Fiction"

┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│   History of Mexico   │
│   │
│   Cinema   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘

Team-Taught Triads of Courses

The Quanta Program at
Daytona Beach Community College

A year-long program involving 3 courses (9 credits) each semester.

Fall	**Spring**
"The Quest for Identity: the Search for Identity and Intimacy"	"Threshold to the Millennium: Towards a Better World"

English 1 (Composition) + Psychology of Adjustment + Humanities 1	English 2 (Literature) + General Psychology + Humanities 2

Team-Taught Course Schedule for the Quanta Program

- 3 faculty members

- 65-75 students

- 9 hours of semester credit

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9-12 Inter-disciplinary study involving English, Psychology and Humanities		9-12 Inter-disciplinary study involving English, Psychology and Humanities		9-12 Inter-disciplinary study involving English, Psychology and Humanities

Coordinated Study Model

The learning community is engaged "full-time" (15-18 credits) in interdisciplinary, active learning around themes. Faculty development occurs through co-planning and team-teaching across disciplinary boundaries.

- Faculty teams of 3-4 co-plan the coordinated study around an over-arching theme, or around related content/skills subjects

- Generally, faculty members teach *only* in the coordinated study, and students register for it as their entire "course load"

- Therefore, scheduling of class time becomes quite flexible: opportunities for BLOCKS of time for lectures, discussions, field trips, workshops

- Frequent use of "book seminars," collaborative learning, and student projects

Coordinated Study Model

Typical Schedules

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	9-11 Lecture	9-11 Seminar	9-11 Lecture	9-11 Seminar
Prep Day	12-2 Writing Workshops	12-2 Faculty Seminar	12-2 Group Workshops	12-2 Faculty Office Hours

Coordinated Study Model

Typical Schedules

Problems Without Solutions?

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9-10:30 Lecture	9-10:30 Faculty Seminar	8-1:00 Literacies Workshop	9-10:30 Lecture	
11-12:30 Book Seminar	11-12:30 Lecture	• writing • quantitative reasoning • photography	11-12:30 Book Seminar	Prep Day
1:30-3:30 Film/Video	2:30-4:00 Topical Workshops		1:30-3:30 In Conversation Week in Review	

The importance of context: Coordinated Studies Themes

"Ways of Knowing: How We Choose What to Believe"

History, Philosophy, Literature, Drama

"The Televised Mind"

Mass Media, Sociology, Freshman Writing

"Problems Without Solutions?"

Sociology, Economics, History, Politics, Religion

"Looking at the Renaissance: Power and the Person"

Music, History of Art, Drawing, Freshman Writing

"The Science of Mind"

Neurobiology, Cognitive Psychology, Philosophy of Mind and Language

Enrollment in Team-Taught Models

Team-taught models usually enroll students at a ratio of **20-25** students per faculty member.

So, a team-taught program with two teachers enrolls **40-50** students.

This program would be comparable to 4 conventional classes, 2 classes per teacher:

9:00	English	Biology
10:00	Biology	English

Enrollment in Team-Taught Models

A team-taught model with three faculty members would enroll **60-75** students.

The program would be comparable to **9** conventional classes: **3** classes for each teacher:

9:00	History	Film	Literature
10:00	Literature	History	Film
11:00	Film	Literature	History

Situating LCs in appropriate curricular arenas

1. Identify goals for a learning community initiative
    - for students
    - for faculty
    - for the curriculum
    - for the institution

2. Consider areas of need:
    - first-term-in-college adjustment needs and developmental opportunities
    - high-risk courses
    - gateway courses and pre-requisites
    - critical distribution courses
    - platform courses for specific majors
    - courses that are or could be arenas for bridging skills/ content, theory/practice, liberal arts/professions
    - across-curriculum initiatives

3. Consider building on existing nests of interest and opportunity:
    - areas of faculty interest, strength, innovation
    - your college's distinctive mission and location
    - fit with and ability to enhance other initiatives already underway on the campus

Choosing the appropriate LC Model

What are student enrollment patterns?
- usual course loads (full-time, part-time)
- scheduling patterns, needs
- kinds of courses taken (general education, honors, developmental, gateway courses into majors)

What are staff and faculty opportunities and constraints?
- usual teaching loads
- staffing patterns and sizes of key courses
- reward systems
- "riskiness"
- history of collaboration
- interest in deep collaboration
- history of academic/student affairs partnerships
- current advising and placement systems

What is your institutional milieu?
- history of conversations and initiatives around strengthening teaching and learning
- genuine interest in fostering institutional commitment toward cross-disciplinary and cross-unit collaboration
- willingness, flexibility and ability to support change, especially to change planning practices, and resource development
- commitment to focused arenas of change
- fit with other institutional priorities

Support for Learning Community Programs

Support varies from nothing, to all of the following. Support in start-up years is especially critical.

1. A clear locus of leadership, with a steering committee.

2. Planning support for faculty and staff members
   - planning stipends
   - released time before or during the LC offering
   - curriculum planning retreats

3. Faculty development for LC
   - locatable, accountable site for faculty development
   - curriculum planning retreats
   - annual LC institutes
   - various skill-building and sharing opportunities

4. Reduced enrollment for <u>pilot</u> LC classes

5. Special publicity for LC offerings

6. Support (or released time) for LC coordinator

7. Assessment/evaluation support

Are Learning Communities Effective?

- Student outcomes
  - Student retention, achievement
  - Student involvement, motivation
  - Time to degree, degree completion
  - Intellectual development
- Faculty outcomes
  - Faculty development in terms of expanded repertoire of teaching approaches, revised course content, and new scholarly interests.
  - Faculty mentoring
  - Faculty engagement with beginning students, with general education offerings.
- Institutional outcomes
  - Learning communities as "skunk works," i.e., R&D sites for curriculum development, and the strengthening of teaching and learning

Successful Learning Community Implementation

Successful Learning Community implementation requires extensive cross-unit coordination:

Goals for the LC Effort

Assessment Evaluation

Faculty Recruitment

Program Delivery

Faculty Development Support

Locus of Learning Community Leadership

Registrar Registration

LC Offerings Models

Publicity Student Recruitment

Planning Calendar

Involvement of Academic Advisors

Scheduling
- Time
- Rooms

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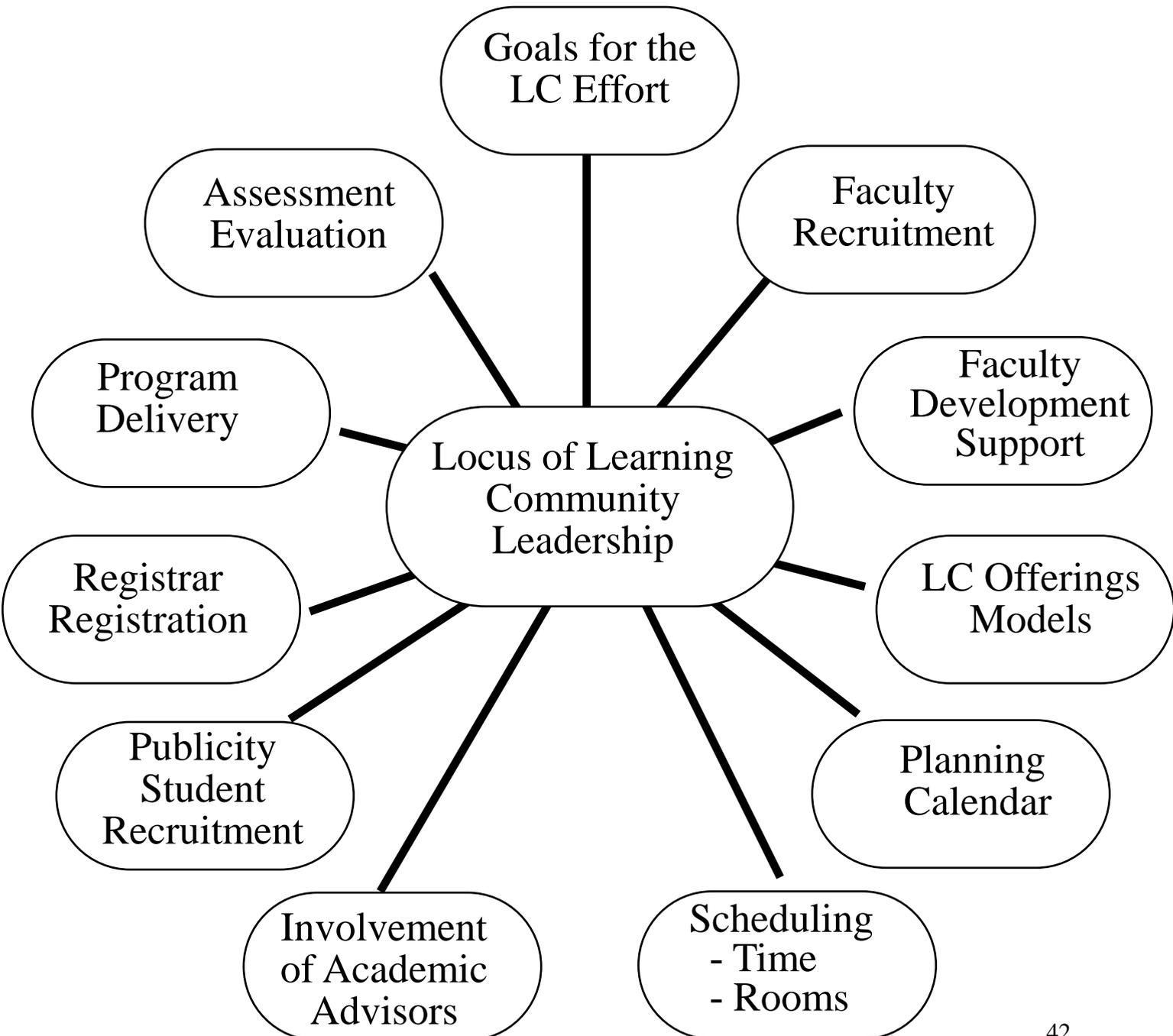
Critical Elements of the Change Process

Impetus for Change

Administrative Support

Leadership Team

Comprehensive View/Shared Vision

Strategic Plan

Inclusive Planning

Student-Focused Goals

Faculty Involvement

Project Director

Information

Networks

Resources

Incentives and Rewards