



# CILC

Consortium for Illinois  
Learning Communities

## 2016 Best Practices Symposium | Truman College Presentation Descriptions

### Plenary Session (9:30 – 10:25 AM):

#### **Life after Learning Communities: The Students' Perspective**

Ana King, Ed.D., Assistant Chair, Communications Department; Helen Valdez, TBLC Program Director and Assistant Professor, Mathematics Department; Carlos Martin Llamazares, Academic Advisor, Student Services Department; Kimberly Steffen, Assistant Professor, Communications Department; Elia Lopez, Instructor, Humanities Department; Olga Ruiz, Assistant Professor, Psychology Department; and Madeline Troche, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Social Science Department, Harry S Truman College, City Colleges of Chicago

The Transitional Bilingual Learning Community (TBLC) at Truman College is, according to the National Learning Communities Project, a highly integrative learning community. The model has over 14 years of history providing first-generation college-going Latino students with the opportunity to take general education courses while still developing their academic English skills, in a setting that includes wrap-around advising and tutoring services, as well as social activities. Research has reported the positive effects of learning communities on student success but does not often discuss the students' perspective of the long-term effects of participation in a learning community. In this session, there will be a brief overview of the TBLC, followed by a panel discussion, in which former TBLC students will discuss where they are now and will address how some of the key elements of integrated learning communities (e.g., curricular integration, collaborative learning, and student engagement), as outlined by the National Center for Postsecondary research (2010), have affected their ability to pursue their higher education. This will be followed by open question-and-answer from the audience. A substantial portion of this presentation will be devoted to audience participation, via question-and-answer with the student panel.

### Breakout Session I (10:40 – 11:30 AM):

#### Room 186/7:

#### **Designing and Implementing a Peer Mentoring Program in a Freshman Learning Community**

George J. Hill, Academic Advisor, Opening Doors Learning Communities, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

This workshop will describe the way students within a Learning Community program worked with student affairs staff, faculty, and administration to design and implement a peer mentoring program within the existing Freshman Learning Communities.

Using Astin's theory of student involvement as a guide, we worked to design a Peer Mentoring program that would pair a student peer mentor with a Student Affairs Professional within a Freshman Seminar course. The Student Affairs Professional's job would be primarily as an academic support, functioning as instructor and academic advisor, while the peer mentor's job would be primarily to engage the students in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Research by Kuh and others has shown that engagement in campus activities, particularly extracurricular activities, has a positive effect on persistence. Our intention in pairing the Student Affairs Professional with a peer mentor in this way was to encourage the students in the Learning Community to engage with the campus community, increasing their likelihood to persist.

The workshop will be structured to provide a chronological history of the program, from the moment when a student first asked "Why don't we have peer mentors in our Learning Communities?", to our initial proposal for adding peer mentors to the existing Learning Community program, to the pilot "Shakedown cruise" in which two volunteer mentors worked within Freshman Seminar classes to work out the ways in which the program needed to adapt, to scaling the program up to include 8 peer mentors across one third of the Freshman Learning Communities. I propose to provide brief prompts describing a situation that we faced while working on the program, and then ask the participants to work in small groups

to come up with what they would do in the situation. I will then tell them what we actually did do, and advance to the next scenario.

Room 146:

**Innovative Marketing and Buy-In Solutions for Learning Communities:**

Marilyn Lorch, Engaged Learning Coordinator, Office of Student Engagement & Experiential Learning, Northern Illinois University

One of the largest hurdles in learning community enrollment is sparking the interest of students. The Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning at Northern Illinois University has experimented with several innovative solutions to foster buy-in among first year students. Among the most successful strategies, are the following: course naming and description standards, an engaging LC selection process for the student, and making perks available to those who choose to participate in an LC. In this session, attendees will learn about the process that NIU's OSEEL office has enacted to attract first-year students to LCs. The final portion of the session will allow time for attendees to work together to determine similar measures that could be taken at their own institution. We practice naming strategies, gamification, and possible perks.

Room 147:

**Learning Communities in the First Year: A Collaborative Approach to Student Support and Retention**

Rebecca Lemanski, Limited Term Lecturer/ Department of English and Philosophy, Purdue University Calumet, Purdue North Central, Ivy Tech Community College and Jade Lee Lynch-Greenberg, Visiting Instructor, Department of English and Philosophy, Purdue University Calumet

At many colleges and universities, learning communities are created to support students within the same major(s) who are undertaking similar coursework, in order to provide additional resources in and out of the classroom. However, the idea of learning communities can mean more to students who arrive with additional challenges before them than typical (traditional) students. Learning communities, created with inter-departmental cooperation, can serve students without majors and/or with conditional admissions and are better able to monitor program participants through their initial coursework to attempt not only to increase retention, but to provide additional encouragement to utilize university resources.

For the concept of Learning Communities to be most successful, instructors within these programs must collaborate to serve the needs of their particular sub-groups of students. According to DeLathowuwer, Roy, Martin, and Liska, "*Within learning communities, students come together to confront real world issues via the disciplines that often seem disconnected at the first-year level*" (2015, p. 29).

In our presentation, we will discuss our experiences working with learning communities with a brief narration of our own experiences within learning communities including the use of a "One Book, One University" selection, which changes yearly and an exploration of best practices as found through years of experience. Based on Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding, we will illustrate the idea that what one student may not be able to do on his or her own, he or she is likely to be more able to do with support from peers and cross-curricular instruction. We will provide a short assignment for workshop attendees to complete (in small groups) to illustrate the importance of group work and interdepartmental collaboration when working with learning communities.

**Breakout Sessions II (11:40 AM – 12:30 PM)**

Room 186/7:

**Targeted Learning Communities: Students Transformatively Engaging in Learning Practices**

Charlie Jones, Targeted Learning Community Coordinator, English Language & Literature Department, Mihaela Giurca, OWRC ELL Specialist & UW Lecturer, International & English Language, Tait Bergstrom, OWRC Tutor & Researcher, UW Instructor, PhD Candidate in Language & Rhetoric, and Peiran Tan, OWRC Tutor & Graphic Design Committee Chair, UW Division of Design, University of Washington

The Targeted Learning Communities (TLC) program at the Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC) fosters learning communities outside of the classroom for English Language Learners (ELLs) in writing and reading intensive courses. Three to five ELLs enrolled in the same course meet weekly with two tutor facilitators to negotiate new academic environments, decode American cultural norms, and build collaboration skills. TLCs were created in response

to a lack of international student support on campus. When students tested below a certain level of English Language competency, they were encouraged to seek additional resources without any clear services to provide this linguistic and academic supplement. TLCs were created to provide such support through a learning community model instead of a remedial class. We believe the specific structure of TLCs rooted in peer collaboration acts as a radical third space for the co-requisite movement in developmental education. We propose to have a 45 minute roundtable discussion. We will have several simultaneous discussions, each facilitated by different TLC facilitators, to share our observations of how TLCs facilitate student learning while exploring the role learning communities can play across and beyond campus. We will introduce the context of TLC and then offer questions to elicit participants' ideas on the necessity, goals, and actions of learning communities.

Room 146:

### **Designing a Problem-Centered Learning Community**

Merry Mayer, Social Science Faculty/ Service Learning Coordinator, Wright College

This session will focus on how using a current problem can enable faculty to easily integrate a LC as well as make content more engaging for students. I will show how I use the Detroit bankruptcy from the perspectives of two disciplines—economics and geography--to teach discipline concepts. There will also be some discussion of how a problem-based approach can provide for incorporating service learning. We will form small groups to have attendees brainstorm about possible problems they could use and then approach those problems from two or more disciplines. I will also ask them to come up with a possible related service project.

Room 147:

### **Creating an Atmosphere for Inquiry**

Beth Harris, Adjunct Faculty, Harry S Truman College, City Colleges of Chicago

This session will focus on ways to establish a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning – one where students feel safe to explore, question, participate, and grow. Facilitating such a community is important in any classroom, but perhaps especially so in a co-requisite workshop situation.

I will present some of my favorite activities, and, in the process, session participants will also be encouraged to share their ideas, activities, successes, and frustrations. In particular, the session will focus on week one activities and on group discussion activities that can be used to encourage the development of a classroom community. Attendees of this session will participate in classroom exercises that they can then adapt to fit their own course needs and teaching styles.

The session will begin with a group brainstorming activity that can be used early in the semester to help establish the tone of the classroom. As time permits, other interactive elements might focus on simulating classroom discussions that include all participant voices.

## **Lunch (12:30-1:30PM)**

## **Breakout Sessions III (1:30 – 2:20 PM):**

Room 186/7:

### **Everything but the Kitchen Sink: How to Effectively Manage Pressures to Address Student Life Issues within Learning Communities**

Pam Person, Director, First Year Experience & Learning Communities and Lauren Bosselait, Associate Director, First Year Experience and Learning Communities, University of Cincinnati

Learning Communities are increasingly positioned as an intervention strategy for student success in addition to an instructional strategy for delivering specific course content. At times, pressure to incorporate multiple student life and student learning priorities into an institution's Learning Community framework can be overwhelming. This discussion-based session will explore various ways in which Learning Community programs and faculty articulate their goals and priorities for connecting student life with student learning, design their learning communities to achieve their goals, and determine whether or not they've been successful. Guided discussion and curriculum design exercises will highlight best practice options for dealing with commonly experienced pressures around topics like balancing stakeholder interests, implementing change, managing multiple moving parts related to enrollment and instructional delivery, and maintaining

program integrity. Participants who are new to Learning Communities or experienced participants who are seeking insight on how to manage requests for incorporating additional student life or student success outcomes to their current Learning Community approach will find this session valuable.

Room 146:

**Pedagogy with Purpose: Writing FOR the Community**

Colleen Stribling, Associate Professor ESL, and Alison Douglas, Associate Professor, English, Elgin Community College

This session details a collaboration between two faculty members combining Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Composition at a community college. As part of the “evolution” of this learning community pairing, the faculty enlisted a community partner to create a meaningful purpose and “voice” for the emerging writers in the class. The partner, a literacy program serving the needs of adult English language learners in the same community, had particular meaning for this group of learners as many had struggled with the same “fears, demands, and dreams” of the learners in the program. (See detail attached). Presenters will poll the participants on practice and lead a brainstorming activity in groups on ways to integrate the community in their courses in a meaningful way.

Room 147:

**Researching American Media and History in English and Social Science Learning Communities**

Kate Gillespie, Assistant Professor of English, Communications Department; Dionysios Skentzis, Assistant Professor of History, Social Science Department; Kim Steffen, Assistant Professor of English, Communications Department; and Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Social Science Department, Truman College

How are race and gender portrayed in the American media? How do our experiences in the United States today connect to people and events from the past? At Truman College, two learning communities help students address these questions by pairing English 102 (Research Writing) with a Social Science course. This session will highlight how the instructors have integrated course topics, reading material, and assignments in order to reinforce students’ understanding of the Social Science content and to engage students in a more focused, authentic research process than might be found in a traditional English 102 course. One of the learning communities, “The Portrayal of Power and Inequality in American Media,” combines English 102 with Sociology 201: Introduction to the Study of Society. The other, “Making History: Finding Your Way into the American Past,” combines English 102 with History 112: History of the American People from 1865. Panelists will share some of their classroom methods and assignments and will discuss accomplishments and challenges from these course pairings.

The panelists will open a discussion about best practices for assessing this type of linked course. Given that a key aim for pairing English 102 with Social Science is to engage students more meaningfully with the course content and research process, what is the most effective way to assess students’ engagement and learning? Because these learning communities are in the early stages, the instructors have been focusing on integrating the content and assignments. The next phase will involve assessing student learning, and conference participants will be asked to share ideas and offer feedback on possible assessment techniques.