



CONSORTIUM FOR ILLINOIS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2023 Best Practices Symposium Session Descriptions

Plenary Session (9:00 – 9:50 AM)

Keeping it Solid, Keeping it Fresh

James Gould, Emeritus Instructor of Philosophy, and Ted Hazelgrove, Instructor of English, McHenry County College

Successful Learning Community programs are both solid and fresh. In addition to being firm and stable, they are full of energy and vigor. LC programs are sustained by professors—so faculty, too, must be solid and fresh. In this workshop we reflect on our experience of teaching together for 20-plus years. As our careers draw to a close, we synthesize lessons from our journey. We discuss how a long-term teaching partnership fosters solidity—and how that solidity is the foundation of freshness. We suggest that solid faculty share a pool of content and pedagogy as well as deep knowledge of the other’s personality. And we suggest that fresh faculty are always innovating and improvising based on a continuous curiosity about ideas. We discuss the balance between solidity and freshness: structure alone can create stale and compartmentalized teaching, while improvisation alone becomes a rambling and unguided discussion.

We explain how collaboration became for us not simply an alternative pedagogical approach, but a way of keeping our teaching souls both solid and fresh. The triple wellspring of our approach is (1) Paulo Friere’s notion of problem-posing education, (2) Aristotle’s analysis of virtuous friendship and (3) Parker Palmer’s work in the spirituality of teaching.

Breakout Session I (10:00 – 10:50 AM):

Starting with the Basics: An Introduction to Learning Communities, Room D-195

Dr. James Allen, Professor of English and Learning Communities Director, College of DuPage

This session is intended for attendees who are new to learning communities. The presenter will review the basic elements of this high impact practice, including curriculum design, faculty recruitment/development, logistics, and assessment. If time allows, the presenter will take the participants through the process of developing a learning community “on the fly.”

Learning Communities as DERA Response, Room D-193

Megan Dallianis, Interim Associate Dean of Interdisciplinary Student Success, Harper College

In response to the Illinois Developmental Education Reform Act (DERA), Harper College collapsed developmental math and English sequences to allow students the opportunity to complete their gateway math and English coursework within two semesters of entering the college. To support students through these accelerated math and English pathways, Harper paired developmental math and English courses designed for the lowest placing students with First Year Seminar success courses to provide wraparound support for students, help build their confidence and motivation, and support the development of an academic identity. These Learning Communities contextualized success strategies within math and English coursework to promote engagement with the college and subject areas in which these students often have a history of low intrinsic beliefs on performance. Preliminary data shows that students enrolling in these Learning Communities their first semester are progressing to college-level math and English at greater rates that what was seen with the previous developmental math and English sequencing. Discussion of college responses to DERA will be included.

Breakout Session II (11:00 – 11:50 AM)

The Role of Assessment in Any Learning Community Initiative, Room D-195

Charles R. Pastors, Professor Emeritus, Northeastern Illinois University; Principal QUEST For Student Success

If you are to establish a viable and enduring LC program at your institution, you will have to have administrative support. That means you will have to be able to show why your administration should spend, from limited resources, time and money on maintaining such an effort. Attendees will learn how a student survey can make a persuasive argument for supporting an ongoing LC program. Attendees will construct a list of reasons for a LC program at their institution, frame draft questions to probe students' experiences in areas not amenable for documentation through normal institutional measurements and be introduced to a case study of how this process can be played out.

Now Streaming: Hy-Flex Learning to Bring Students Back to Our Communities, Room D-193

Stephanie Whalen, Chair, Academy for Teaching Excellence, Jen Lau-Bond, Librarian, Ana Contreras. Instructor, English, and Janet Woods, Instructional Technology Coordinator, Harper College

During the rapid online transition brought about by the pandemic, students and faculty struggled to stay connected in fully online, asynchronous experiences. Campuses are now open, but we continue to offer more online, asynch courses than before to accommodate busy schedules and balance multiple needs. Hy-Flex learning communities offer students a way to return to the classroom community in a format that still allows them to attend via live stream or catch up on missed courses asynchronously if needed with the support of a cohort of students, two faculty to provide academic coaching, embedded college support services, and an integrated learning experience. Join us for an overview of a First Year Seminar and English 101 Learning Community in which the faculty ask students to take ownership for their choices to help increase their awareness of the many ways they can engage. Participants will experience some of the ways hy-flex learning community participants interact in person and online in a hy-flex Learning Community course.

Lunch (12:00 – 12:45 PM): Building D, Room 190

We encourage you to mix and mingle!

Breakout Sessions III (1:00 – 1:50 PM)

Advantages & Obstacles: A Programmatic Learning Community, Room D-195

Dawn McKinley, Associate Professor in Accounting/ Integrative Learning Coordinator, and Enrique D'Amico, Associate Professor in Computer Information Systems, Harper College

Offering a learning community can have many advantages, but also obstacles to overcome to be successful. This can be especially true when the learning community courses are specific to a major. Join us for a discussion of how we have learned to make the most of the advantages of a learning community while overcoming obstacles, including those related to offering a learning community specifically for students pursuing a business degree. Attendees will compile specific advantages and/or obstacles for learning communities offered currently or potential future learning communities at their institution.

Our Sustainable Learning Community: How a Learning Community on Sustainability Can Be an Example of Learning Communities Built to Last, Room D-193

John Garcia, Full-Time Faculty, Philosophy, and Julie Ellefson, Adjunct Faculty (Retired Full Time Faculty), Chemistry, Harper College

Creation of a Learning Community often depends on specific faculty members who connect with one another and share a desire to teach together. Often, these Learning Communities often have specific themes, that may be of interest to the faculty who come together to teach it. In contrast, in choosing to create a Learning Community based on Sustainability, we were able to create a Learning Community that lends itself to countless combinations of disciplines and can exist well beyond any pairing of instructors. We invite you to join us for a discussion of

how we can design Learning Communities that can be similarly sustainable. Our hope is that we will generate a true discussion of different possible combinations of Learning Communities and themes that are broad enough to attract sustained student and faculty interest, taking the session beyond a “presentation followed by questions” format. We will invite participants to think about pairings and “perennial questions” with us.

Symposium Wrap-up: Continuing the Conversation (2:00 – 2:30 PM), Building D, Room 190

Attendees will have additional time to connect with some of the presenters and participants to build on discussions from the day’s sessions.