



CONSORTIUM FOR ILLINOIS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2024 Best Practices Symposium Session Descriptions

Plenary Session (9:00 – 9:45 AM)

Life's Lessons from Those Who Have "Been There, Done That"

Charles R. Pastors, Professor Emeritus, Northeastern Illinois University; Principal QUEST For Student Success (moderator), Jim Allen, Professor, English and Learning Communities Director, College of DuPage, Dr Daniela Broderick, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, McHenry County College, Dr. Aaron Lawler, Associate Professor of Humanities, Waubensee Community College, and Dawn McKinley, Associate Professor in Accounting/ Integrative Learning Coordinator.

The panelists will discuss their accomplishments and challenges of creating, building, and sustaining their learning communities programs and will invite questions and comments from the attendees. At the end of the plenary, symposium attendees will have an opportunity to list what they want to continue discussing at lunch during the "Learning Communities Café."

Breakout Session I (10:00 – 11:00 AM):

Planning to Start or Expand an LC Program: Be Prepared to Multi-task Like a Single Parent of Three Kids with a Fulltime Job, Who Enjoys Gardening and Cooking, SRC 2000 A

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

Attendees will construct a general multi-year timeline for the numerous steps to be taken and tasks to be completed between the decision to move forward and the "success" of the effort.

Foster Belonging: A Learning Community to Cultivate Inclusion, SRC 2000 B

Toni Countryman, Instructor, English, and Shiela Venkataswamy, Instructor, Sociology, McHenry County College

Combining a skills-based course (English Composition or Speech) and a social science course (Sociology, Social Psychology, Cultural Anthropology) as an integrated learning community can become a catalyst for inclusion in the classroom. In our learning community course at McHenry County College, "The Matrix: Living in 3D," which is an integration of English Composition I and Introduction to Sociology courses, we try to foster a sense of academic belonging working with an inclusive curriculum, pedagogy, and environment. An inclusive academic curriculum enriches the classroom with DEI issues while offering co-curricular engagement opportunities. Our classroom pedagogy strives for exposure to a curriculum rich in diversity and equity issues using problem solving, increased contact between students by means of collaborative work, and collective accountability. Additionally, we use wise interventions to create a psychologically safe environment. This combination also provides a framework for working on college diversity and equity initiatives at a grassroots level. The audience will get an opportunity to participate in one of the activities on social identity which we use in our classroom. Additionally, we will share some reflections by the students on their classroom experience.

Breakout Session II (11:15 AM – 12:15 PM)

Paying it Forward: Options for LC Curriculum Design, SRC 2000 A

Jim Allen, Professor, English and Learning Communities Director, Sam Mitrani, Professor, History, Jackie McGrath, Professor, English, Stephanie Vlach, Assistant Professor, Physical Education, and College of DuPage

LC faculty from College of DuPage will discuss some of their different approaches to designing and teaching LC, including using hybrid and online modalities and other high-impact practices to enhance student learning and engagement.

SuperTwofer, Phase III: Pilot Launch at the Community College for High Impact Practices, SRC 2000 B

Kate Middy, Instructor of English, Learning Communities Chairperson, McHenry County College

McHenry County College's High Impact Practices Pilot (combining LCs, Pathways, First Year Experience, and Capstone Assessment) has been launched. This session will use the Title III grant initiative to explain the hows and whys of the process and offer an open discussion about how this model might apply to any college that wants to use what already works for students to increase the impact of the Pathways movement, while bolstering enrollment and interest in Learning Communities. In this third phase, pilot recruitment's pitfalls and successes will also be shared, as well as the professional development plan of the faculty involved. Finally, we will outline the innovative assessment model being implemented this December: a capstone SuperTwofer showcase.

After presenting Phase I and II in 2021 and 2022 at the National Learning Communities Conference, McHenry County College is in Phase III of a high impact practices pilot, centered around student success, faculty excellence, and a rejuvenation of the Learning Communities program. The 2023 launch offers LCs that fit into specific career pathways, co-taught by two faculty who also embed the first-year experience course (MCC 101) into the LC. These SuperTwofers provide first semester students with a high-touch Twofer course for classes in their prospective fields, with the goal of increased retention, persistence, achievement, and expedited immersion into their future areas of focus. This session will use the Title III grant initiative to explain the hows and whys of the process and offer an open discussion about how this model might work for any college that wants to use what already works for students to increase the impact of the Pathways movement, while bolstering enrollment and interest in Learning Communities. In this third phase, pilot recruitment's pitfalls and successes will also be shared, as well as the professional development plan of the faculty involved. Finally, we will outline the innovative assessment model being implemented this December: a capstone SuperTwofer showcase - another high impact practice!

Lunch (12:15 – 1:45 PM): SRC 2000 D-G

Learning Communities Café: We encourage attendees to join in conversations on a variety of topics important to learning communities programs as chosen during at the end of the plenary. We will also provide time for each table to report out to the group.

Breakout Sessions III (2:00 – 3:00 PM)

Growing an ESL Learning Community Garden - Flowers, Thorns, and Weeds, SRC 2000 A

Ashley Fifer, Instructor, English, and Cara Tuzzolino, Technical Assistant, Writing Center, Nassau Community College

Beginning in the fall of 2023, our ESL students at Nassau Community College were moved from an English language immersion program into the mainstream English department. Professors Fifer and Tuzzolino worked to create new ESL-designated sections of Writing and Reading courses which were paired in Fall 2023 and are expected to pair again in the future. In this session, we plan to share about the creation of these learning communities, including curriculum, support from administration, challenges and future opportunities.

We will highlight the high levels of student engagement and success in the Learning Communities that ran. Samples of activities from ESL Reading courses paired with RDG 103 (Reading the Media) and THR 103 (Intro to Acting) will be shared, as well as details regarding high pass rates for the courses. In the interactive segment of our session, we plan to use small group break-out sessions to find out about our attendees' non-native English-speaking populations at their home institutions and elicit suggestions on how they would integrate ESL students into Learning Communities, along with which courses might be paired effectively and which might present challenges. We look forward to learning from and collaborating with our peers.

Not Your Grandpa's Assessment Tool: Building a Meaningful and Innovative Metric for Learning Communities That Matches the Pedagogical Intention of Collaborative and Critical High Impact Practice, SRC 2000 B

Kate Middy, Instructor of English, Learning Communities Chairperson, Christine Grela, Instructor of Psychology, Mike Regan, Instructor of Sociology, Lisa Roth, Instructor of Speech and Communications, Sarah Ruthven, Instructor of Art, and Tim Seitz, Instructor of Philosophy McHenry County 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.

In order to measure student outcomes in the SuperTwofer pilot, innovators also agreed to implement an additional high impact practice: the capstone project. Each of the three Learning Communities in the pilot is taught by instructors from different disciplines and for students with very different future plans, but they all worked to create a collaborative assessment tool that brings LC assessment to the same level of innovation as the courses themselves. Attendees will learn about the approaches, plans, and practicalities of launching the courses, pilot, and final assessment, creating an outline for implementation in their own LC courses.

Learning Communities Café—Dessert Menu (3:00 – 3:30 PM), SRC 2000 D - G

Building on items discussed during the Lunch Discussion Tables and Symposium Sessions, attendees will have additional time to connect with some of the presenters and participants to build on discussions from the day's sessions.