



CONSORTIUM FOR ILLINOIS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2025 Best Practices Symposium Session Descriptions

Morning Plenary Session (9:00 – 10:15 AM)

Waubonsee Learning Communities Student Panel, APC 110D

Steve Zusman, Associate Professor of Philosophy, co-moderating with Aaron Lawler, Associate Professor of Humanities, Waubonsee Community College.

Come hear from the voices that matter the most: students! This panel will assemble students from Waubonsee's pilot learning community courses over the past year. These students will speak directly about their experiences within learning communities. Come find out why students register for learning communities, the benefits they see from taking learning communities, some areas in which learning communities might improve, and much more! We will make sure to leave some time for audience questions as well.

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

Assessing Student Engagement as a Community of Learners, APC 160

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

Part of the assessment of learning community objectives at McHenry County College focuses on building communities. Our course "The Matrix " combines Introduction to Sociology and Composition I. After two years of data on this objective we decided to try strategies that would be useful to build a stronger community of learners in our Fall 2024 class. We focused on teamwork and student engagement within the classroom through various activities. Then we conducted a survey at the end of the semester that assessed these specific activities. In this presentation we will share some of the strategies we used for student engagement based on resources we obtained from an ACUE course. Additionally, we will share the results of the student survey which was used to assess the usefulness of the various ACUE strategies in the learning process and questions related to community building.

We're All "Cringe" and That's Okay: Engaging Hot Topics When the Students Know More than Us, APC 170

Paige Lush, Instructor, Dept. of Music, and Robert McCord, Instructor, English, McHenry County College

A dead learning community in music appreciation and freshmen composition was resurrected and rethemed into a course on video game music. Paige Lush and Robert McCord will discuss the challenges of teaching a topic in which the students are highly invested.

Lunch (11:45 AM – 12:30 PM): APC 110D

Afternoon Plenary Session (12:30 – 1:45 PM)

From LC Program Plagues to Practical Processes: Shifting the Spotlight to Solutions for Stability, APC 110D

Jim Allen, Professor, English and Learning Communities Director, College of DuPage, Dawn McKinley, Associate Professor, Accounting, and Integrative Learning Coordinator, Harper College, Kate Midday, Instructor of English, Learning Communities Chairperson, McHenry County College, and Charles Pastors, Principal, QUEST

In a world where stalwart learning communities programs can be dismantled overnight, and seemingly embedded teaching and learning practices are eliminated without cause, LC leadership can often be found in conference sessions and round tables fretting over the innumerable challenges facing their programs – and rightly so.

However, there are things that we can and should do, as practitioners of innovation, to help better tether ourselves to the institutions we serve. There are steps we can take to cement our praxis to the missions of our colleges. There are real plans we can set in motion to make it hard to swipe us away with administrative turnover or political headwinds.

Learning Communities programs must situate themselves amongst the bedrock of our institutions. To address vulnerabilities, this plenary will focus on the pragmatism of becoming a long-term, institutionalized learning communities program.

We will co-create a list of sustainable ideas for attendees to bring home for implementation to avoid the fate of many of our once-thriving programs.

We will address:

- Collaborations and connections we have created on campus
- Visibility
- Success stories
- Union or contract language
- Shared governance
- Administrative oversight, direct reporting, and supervision
- Initiative support

Breakout Session II (2:00 – 3:00 PM)

Welcoming Sister Institutions into the LC Fold: Institutional Mentorship Programs at the Regional College Level, APC 160

Steve Zusman, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Aaron Lawler, Associate Professor of Humanities, Waubensee Community College., and Kate Midday, Instructor of English, Learning Communities Chairperson, McHenry County College

For six years, McHenry County College has mentored Waubensee Community College in the creation of a Learning Communities Program. Through a collegial willingness to understand the unique dynamics of sister institutions, consistency, patience, and some old-fashioned persistence, Waubensee Community College is in the pilot year of their own supported Learning Communities program. We encourage others to get on the path toward mentorship as they lay the groundwork for an LC program launch, specifically with a college that is similar in mission, scope, size, and programmatic possibility. There is a benefit to understanding the context of a program's growing ground, and a success that can come from that shared experience as faculty/program leadership. Kate Midday of McHenry County College as mentor and Aaron Lawler and Steve Zusman of Waubensee Community College as mentee,

will lay out in this interactive session the unique challenges facing a community college in forming a new program, some strategies that were ineffective and effective in bringing the launch to life, and some steps for forming a mentorship with another institution.

Promoting Civic Engagement through the Facilitation of Meaningful Conversations, APC 170

Jennifer Armstrong, Clinical Associate Professor, and Mariaton Tate, Assistant Dean for Student Success, Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago

Over the past year, we have made intentional efforts to engage students in conversation on the value of civic engagement in the current political and social climate. During this session, we will discuss some of these efforts, including participation in the 2024 Bridging the Divide Conference, the development of Voting & Beyond, and facilitating early voting site visits. In this session, we aim to highlight the importance of creating intentional space for students to dialogue about current events. We will also share ways that we are continuing civic engagement efforts on campus through curricular and co-curricular programming. Participants will walk away from this session with strategies for engaging in constructive dialogue, ideas to increase civic engagement with their learners, and be inspired to be agents for change in their communities.

Further Conversation and Wrap Up (3:00 – 3:30 PM), APC 110D

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