



CONSORTIUM FOR ILLINOIS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

2026 Best Practices Symposium Session Descriptions

Breakout Session I (9:00 – 10:00 AM):

How We Spent Our Summer

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

No, this is not about our most cliché writing prompt. McHenry County College has a rather robust New Student Orientation program with sessions a couple times a month over the summers. There are specific tasks the new enrollees can complete, but there is also a gauntlet of tables for promoting organizations and programs. We have found that staffing the tables gives us a chance to interact with students and has increased enrollment. Many of these students don't know what a learning community is and how it can enhance their college experience. It has been invaluable to attend these events. We wrangle them over, bolstered with many promotional handouts with our always clever titles -- stickers, instructions, and promotional pens. Yes, it sometimes feels like being a used car salesman, but we get the chance to get to know them and connect them with our classes and the benefits of learning communities. We also can go into registration rooms to help staff and there we can recruit and register students. In this session we will share techniques, tricks, materials, and more that can be used at any orientation, registration, or promotion events.

Benefits of a Diversified Living Learning Community Cohort

Cindy Voisine and Jon Hageman, Northeastern Illinois University

To create a community of students that provides academic, social and professional support, we built Living Learning Communities that include freshmen through seniors seeking degrees in a variety of majors. This mixed student cohort model creates opportunities that “lift” students’ interests, commitment, and ability to persist in challenging academic fields. To accomplish this, we utilize peer mentors, co-curricular activities, and a shared course format. We will share information on the process of peer mentor selection, interfacing with peer mentors, and outlining their responsibilities. Additionally, we will highlight examples of successful co-curricular activities in and outside the formal course structure. Student feedback on these strategic efforts will be shared during the presentation. We have found that these interactive and diverse communities allow students to share their interests, build friendships, and create a stronger sense of belonging and identity with their peers and in their chosen discipline.

Breakout Session II (10:15 – 11:15 AM)

But Do They Work? Adventures in Assessing LC

Jim Allen and Sarah Butler, College of DuPage

At College of DuPage, we have been assessing aspects of our learning communities

for twenty years in a variety of ways. Our presentation will first review what we have attempted to measure and what we have found (or not found), then invite attendees to share their assessment triumphs and tribulations as well as we search for effective assessment methods together.

LLCs @ NEIU: A Case Study About a Living Learning Communities Program at an Urban HIS
Pamela Geddes and Veronica Rodriguez, Northeastern Illinois University

In this proposed session, we will present information on a relatively new Living Learning Community program at an urban Hispanic-Serving Institution where most of our student body comes from underrepresented and marginalized populations (37% Latinx, 11% African American, 9% Asian), are first-generation college attendees, and are Pell Grant recipients. We present information about our particular student body and key strategies and approaches we are implementing to intentionally serve our student population. We highlight how our LLC program explicitly embeds strategies to remove equity barriers that affect our student population and the opportunities and challenges that come with this work. More specifically, we describe how our 7 current LLCs are structured, the type of academic and co-curricular programming we implement, our relationship with the privately-owned residence hall, and how we cultivate and develop sense of belonging of our students with respect to not only our institution but also to their majors/interest areas. Additionally, we provide assessment data for the last years of the program, which have revealed how our intentionality in serving our students has resulted in the removal of some important barriers for our underserved students (e.g., financial, housing, commuting time to school, etc.). Throughout our presentation we will highlight the opportunities that have arisen through the intentionality of our work, but also the many challenges we have experienced with respect to communication, funding, logistics, and implementation. We hope to facilitate a dialogue with the audience to find commonalities and unique aspects of our collective programs and share how many of these ideas could be transferable to other institutional contexts. We contend that programming that is tailored to the specific needs of a particular student population will result in better and more equitable outcomes.

Plenary Session (12:15 – 1:15 PM)

NEIU Learning Communities Student Panel

Veronica Rodriguez, Northeastern Illinois University

Come hear from the voices that matter the most: students! This panel will assemble students from NEIU's living learning communities from 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 III (1:30 – 2:30 PM)

Convincing Your School That, For Learning Communities, "The Price is Right"

Charles Pastors, QUEST

No Learning Community program is going to be seen as indispensable to your institution such as English, Writing, Chemistry or [perhaps] Philosophy. Strong backing from your current CEO, CFO and COO won't help when they are no longer around. Their support might even weaken under competing pressures for limited financial resources. You must be busy developing and maintaining a strong factual

basis for their support for your LC efforts. Why have LCs? Why have them here? How do we know they are "worth it" at our place? A solid assessment protocol "sells" your product. This workshop will help participants develop a LC "sales pitch" to keep their product on your institution's store shelves. [Now, you will just have to convince your customers (students) to try such a wondrous product.]

The Trials and Tribulations of Creating a Learning Community

James Allen and Les Wolf, College of DuPage

What do you get when you combine a seasoned LC instructor with someone relatively new to LCs who, despite being friends, have never worked together, let alone developed a learning community together, especially one focused on theme of Truth? Come hear our tale from conception through development through execution to our current state of radical revision! We will invite attendees to share similar tales and lessons learned!