Learning Communities Open House  
Ames, IA - February 27, 2004

Attended by:  
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Prior to attending the LC Open House, this group solicited questions from the TLC Priority group for which they would like us to pursue answers. At the conference, we divided ourselves among the various conference session offerings to ensure that we gained as broad a spectrum of information as possible. The following is a summary of what we learned in regard to the topics generated by the Priority group, as well as other information that we felt pertinent to the work of the Priority group.

1) **Curricular Models Iowa State Is Using** - Iowa State is utilizing three types of LC structures:
   a) Clustered = students take courses together as a cohort group, but the curricula of those courses are not integrated
   b) Linked = curricula of two or more classes are intertwined; content of courses is coordinated between faculty
   c) Both = a combination where some courses are linked and some are clustered

Iowa State utilizes a “Request for Proposals” (RFP) format for receiving LC program ideas from faculty and staff. The RFP outlines the components and criteria that are recommended for LCs. The proposals are linked to institutional or departmental goals. Their definition of a LC has broadened as their LC program has grown, and they strongly encouraged remaining flexible in this regard.

The University of Iowa representatives indicated that they also include “thematic” LCs in their repertoire. In these LCs, students share an interest in a theme topic, but are not enrolled in courses as a cohort (examples might include multiculturalism or service learning).

2) **The Function of the Program: Ways to Sustain the LC Program Beyond the Freshman Year** - Iowa State’s learning communities encompass two semesters. We learned of a few ways that upperclass students are involved in LCs, as well:
   • A Health and Human Performance LC splits a portion of the class so that freshman and transfers have independent time with the faculty
Engineering expects all their students to participate in LCs. The entire School is built upon a competency model, and the LCs incorporate the competencies and vice versa.

- Upperclass students are involved with faculty in research and scholarship.
- Career exploration and major determination applies beyond the first year.

3) **Training for Faculty Facilitators and Peer Educators** - At Iowa State, training for Peer Mentors and faculty is conducted by a sub-committee of the LC Advisory Committee. They train for 2 days before classes begin, plus on-going development sessions for Peer Mentors. Web-based assistance is available for faculty, and an annual “LC Institute” is offered for faculty and staff each Spring. The Center for Teaching Excellence offers workshops for faculty that are applicable to LCs during the course of the year. Faculty indicated that they wished they had information about “active learning” before their involvement with LCs. Assistance is provided for faculty and staff in the RFP process, as well.

It was our opinion that the “Institute” is a great concept, and we could see something like this here at KU, perhaps in conjunction with the annual Teaching Summit.

4) **Language Houses** - “Global Issues” theme houses is the direction in which Iowa State is moving. They once offered a Spanish LC that comprised a portion of a residence hall floor. Integrating it with the rest of the floor didn’t work well.

We felt that a language TLC without a language immersion component would work fine here at KU.

5) **Entrepreneurship LCs** - Iowa State is not offering such a LC at this time.

6) **Web-Based Repository for LC Courses** - The most useful resource for LCs seems to be the Learning Communities Project and Evergreen State College. ISU also has a very good LCs website with many helpful resources. They have a large listing of the scholarly works of their faculty regarding LCs. See the following: [http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/](http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/) [http://www.iastate.edu/~learncommunity/](http://www.iastate.edu/~learncommunity/)

It is the opinion of our group that while it might be an interesting project for KU to aspire to, coordinating a LC course repository is ahead of where our focus needs to be at this point.

7) **LC Impact on Retention: 1-Semester Versus 2-Semester Programs** - All LCs at ISU are 2-semesters, so they do not have data regarding 1 vs. 2 semester programs.

What we learned regarding retention data for ISU’s LC program is that freshmen who participate in LCs are retained at 8.3% higher rate than students not
participating in LCs (80-81% non-LC; 88-92% LC). In these student’s second year, they are retained at a 12.9% higher rate (73% vs. 85.9%) than students who didn’t participate in LCs. There is a 16% difference in the 5-year graduation rate of non-LC/LC students at ISU (55.5% vs. 72.1%).

8) Classroom and LC Management of Community Development (cliques, etc.) - Personality inventories are used to familiarize students with one another and to help prevent community challenges. Meetings between Peer Mentors and faculty include discussions of individual students’ growth and factors impacting that. Faculty actively connect with students who are disengaged. Assessment feedback has been helpful for discussion of group dynamics. (One faculty member said that she put feedback received from students on an overhead for classroom discussion, and it included comments about a disruptive clique. Thereafter, if clique behavior cropped up in class, she put the overhead up again to signal a reminder. It worked.)

Other information gleaned at the conference that is pertinent to TLCs at KU:

- More than one TLC can be easily embedded in large classes
- English/rhetoric classes are a natural fit for LC linked classes due to the flexibility and adaptability of course content
- LCs at ISU are faculty-driven. They had given faculty an opportunity to run with LCs until a critical mass developed, then positions were created to coordinate the LC program.
- An active Steering Committee is critical
- Marketing the program is key to its success, both with academic units and with students. Need to coordinate well with Admissions, and with the marketing people in academic units.
- It is important to fund opportunities for LCs and the faculty to take field trips or host other ‘team-building’ or ‘bonding’ activities early in the school year (or before classes begin)
- As the size of ISU’s program grew, Peer Mentor funding had to be limited to a ‘base package’ that could be enhanced by academic units if they wanted to require more of their PM or if they wanted to compensate them at a higher level.
- The RFP process is an excellent way to facilitate the development of LCs. It provides a thorough means of ensuring intentionality and investment in the programs that are being proposed, and provides faculty with a locus of control within boundaries that the university is willing/able to sustain.