

Learning Communities at Appalachian: Growth, Change, Influences



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Program Objectives

- Explore the external influences of institutional and national issues on the development of learning communities
- Discuss the breadth of learning communities that developed in response to these issues
- Imagine the future of learning communities in these contexts

A Brief History of Learning Communities

- 1930s: Earliest roots: Meiklejohn (Wisconsin), Dewey
- 1960s: alternative education movement: Learning communities were often "counterculture" in both content and pedagogy; Tussman (Berkeley)
- 1970s: Founding of Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington
- 1980s: Counterculture receded; remaining LCs went in two general directions:
 1. Honors colleges (curricular and/or residential)
 2. "Theme Housing" supported by Residence Life
- 1990s: Resurgence in interest

Appalachian State University: A Microcosm of LC Development

- We will look back at a brief history of the development of Appalachian's learning communities *in the context of national and institutional influences*
- We will look ahead to future influences and attempt to predict what learning communities might look like in response

The Critical Point

Learning communities do not (and should not) develop in a vacuum.

ASU Learning Issues Communities		1972 : Watauga College 1974 : Student Support Services 1974 : Honors Program	1985 : Teaching Fellows 1988 : Freshmen Seminar	1997 : Learning Communities Council 1998 : Freshman Learning Communities in General Studies	
	Concerns about size and mission	Rapid growth UNC system membership	Refocus on teaching mission Recognition of special needs of freshmen	Recruitment Retention Diversity	Retention Collaboration
	Alternative Education Models	Vast increase in student population Federal Legislation, re: access (anti-poverty)	Federal Legislation Teacher reform movements "Freshman year" issues Economic recession	Higher Education calls for reforms Access/diversity	Recession Changing faculty Institutional competition
	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s

Learning Communities Timeline ↓

1972: Watauga College

- Residential College
- Approximately 200 freshmen and sophomores
- Interdisciplinary courses that meet core requirements
- Has its own faculty

1973: Student Support Services

- Founded in 1973
- Non-residential
- Federally-funded TRIO program
- Serves economically disadvantaged first-generation college students
- Provides instruction, tutoring, counseling and study skills

1974: Honors Program

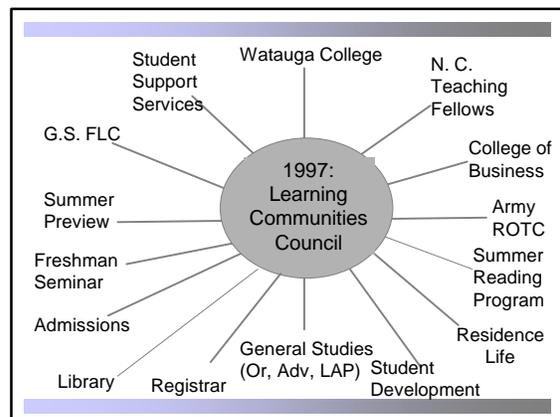
- Top 10 percent of entering class are invited
- Special residence hall available but not required
- Approximately 300 students enrolled in 20-23 courses each semester
- Faculty drawn from across campus

1987: Teaching Fellows

- Statewide program with 14 NC institutions participating
- Highly selective program for future teachers
- Sizeable scholarship in exchange for a promise to teach
- Non-residential
- All students enroll in Leadership Seminar

1988: Freshman Seminar

- Over one half of entering freshmen enroll
- Each section of FS is linked with another course in a learning community
- Non-residential
- Some are department/major-focused
- Significant co-curricular expectations
- 1992: Summer Preview



1998: Freshman Learning Communities in General Studies

- 15-25 students enrolled in two or three courses organized around a common theme, skill or career direction
- Each has an Academic Success Team in addition to faculty (advisor, peer mentor, librarian)
- Current enrollment is approximately 1400 in 68 learning communities

Total Enrollment in Learning Communities

- Freshman Learning Communities=1400
- Honors Program = 250
- Summer Preview = 140
- Watauga College = 120
- NC Teaching Fellows = 60
- Student Support Services=50
- **TOTAL= 2020 out of 2350 freshmen (86%)**

Can you imagine the future?

- What will be national trends and priorities?
- What will be your institution's priorities?
- How can your learning communities initiative adapt to these? *or*
- How can a learning communities initiative *be developed* in response to these?

Some Examples

Institutional/Regional Priority: Preparing students to work in scientific fields

Learning Community response: Freshman learning community in applied science, affiliation with Career Services to offer short-term internship/ "shadow" program

Priority: Increasing global awareness and education

Learning Community response: Link classes, possibly language, business and/or education, connect with Study Abroad programs

Challenges to Future Learning Communities Efforts

- Rapid rate of institutional and social change
- Different opinions regarding institutional priorities
- Clash of cultures within the institution
- Internal structures of an institution

Rapid Rate of Change

- "Permanent whitewater"
- Technology renders predictions inaccurate
- Economic shifts occur quickly
- Others?

Different Opinions on Institutional Priorities

- Who do we want to recruit?
- What is our obligation to underserved, underprepared students?
- How are we different because we're (private, public, land-grant, women's, church-affiliated)?
- Who governs this institution?

Clash of Cultures Within the Institution

- Within faculty: disciplines, pedagogy, tenured v. non-tenured
- Teaching v. research
- Faculty and student affairs/services
- Recruitment/Admissions v. academics
- Others?

Internal Structures of Institution

- Faculty reward structure
- Responsibility for remedial education
- Student fee structure
- Turf issues
- Reward system for collaboration
- Others?

The Benefits of Grounding LC Efforts in Institutional and National Priorities

- More (and more likely) allies across campus
- Efforts less vulnerable to shifting resources
- Other departments/people share responsibility for ensuring success

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