

## What role do you play in learning communities?

Faculty and academic instructors play a large part in the learning community program. Without you, this program would not exist, nor be successful! Your involvement with the learning community program may include:

**Propose a Learning Community.** Faculty create learning communities; the Office of First Year Experience staff helps facilitate them. You can create learning communities centered around a major or academic topic. Some benefits to your department include:

- Co-enrollment in courses and clustered housing assignments to build cohesion within a cohort of incoming students.
- Coordinated access to first-year students interested in your program.
- Mechanisms for coordination, organization, and support through the Office of First Year Experience.

**Teach in a Learning Community.** You don't necessarily have to be the creator of a learning community to teach in one. You can partner with someone who is creating one, or just ask your department chair if a course you teach (or would like to teach) is being offered through a learning community. If you find yourself as an instructor of a learning community course, here are some ways you can get involved:

- ◆ **Create a Linked Course.** One way to create a unique experience for learning community students is to link the content of your course with that of another course the students are taking. That connection can be as simple as connecting ideas in your lecture, or you can create content that is fully integrated with shared assignments, or somewhere in between. This of course requires effort, planning, and collaboration between faculty of different departments and disciplines, but it's an excellent way to foster critical thinking and connections between "unrelated" ideas.
- ◆ **Participate in the Common Read Program.** Learning community students are asked to read a book prior to attending college in the fall. To make that experience more meaningful, read the book yourself, and see how you can bring the topics or ideas from the book into your classroom. If you can't tie it in because it's a cross-listed course or the content really wouldn't work, assist with and participate in the out-of-class experiences we plan for students.
- ◆ **Communicate With the Office of First Year Experience.** The Assistant Director for Academic Initiatives coordinates the learning community program, and has an academic interest in the students in the learning communities. If an individual student is struggling in your class or is having other difficulties and you are concerned, it is within FERPA guidelines to disclose this. Our staff can help get the student connected to tutoring, counseling services, or other resources on campus. Also, please don't hesitate to contact us with questions about your role in the program, upcoming events or anything relating to the learning communities or first-year students in general.
- ◆ **Attend Learning Community Events.** When your LCC contacts you and asks if you'd like to take part in an upcoming event, please do so if it fits into your schedule. They

may ask you to attend social events, academic support activities, dinners, etc. Please do what you are comfortable with.

- ◆ **Participate in Study Groups.** The LCC may plan study groups to correspond with upcoming tests in your class. Students really enjoy when their faculty attend a dinner (on us!) and study group. They get to know you outside of class, and you are helping them become better students.
- ◆ **Help Plan Learning Community Events.** Your LCC may contact you for ideas on what kinds of activities to plan to help support learning community students' academic success. Please share your thoughts and ideas to help make the program stronger. One event in particular is the Make-A-Difference Project, where learning community students are expected to get involved in a service project on our campus or in our community. It's fantastic if their projects can be tied to students' majors or what's going on in class.
- ◆ **Communicate With Your LCC.** If you begin to notice that your learning community students are struggling in your course, let your LCC know. He or she can then plan extra study sessions, direct students to the Center for Academic Success for free tutoring, or take other action to help the students before it's too late in the semester. Of course, this must be kept within the FERPA guidelines, so this is best used if you're seeing a trend with a number of learning community students in your class. If you have concerns directed toward an individual learning community student, call the Office of First Year Experience and speak with Kate Hansen.
- ◆ **Respond to LCC Emails and Calls.** Even if the answer to the LCC's question is "no", take the time to respond. They would rather hear that you cannot help them with their request than hear no answer at all.
- ◆ **Get to Know Students.** Students are often intimidated by faculty, and may not reach out to get to know you even though they may really want to. Get to know individual students and help them get to know you.

These are just some ways to get involved, and you are by no means obligated to do all of them, nor are you limited in these ways. Please become as involved with your learning community as you are comfortable and as your schedule allows.

*Academic Support or Extra Advantage?* You don't need to give learning community students any advantage over traditional students. If you are helping with a study group, treat it as you would treat a student who has come to your office for help. Students are encouraged to come up with specific questions or review areas beforehand. You are definitely not expected to re-teach the entire course!

**Be a Fan and a Supporter.** As you talk with prospective students, families, and other faculty, share your thoughts and experiences with learning communities. This helps recruit students into the program, and helps us find more motivated, creative, and dedicated faculty to help continually improve the program. The best advertising is done through word-of-mouth!