

# **Learning Communities Business Plan Outline**

## **A. Executive Summary**

- a. Introduction to learning communities**
- b. Goals /Objectives of creating learning communities here**
- c. Mission statement of COC with regards to implementing learning communities**
- d. Project members info**

## **B. Project Summary**

- a. Types of learning communities**
- b. Our recommendations for learning communities at COC**
  - i. Cluster model**
    - 1. Summary**
    - 2. Example**
  - ii. Field Studies/Residential**
    - 1. Summary**
    - 2. Example**
  - iii. Thematic**
    - 1. Summary**
    - 2. Example**

## **C. Competition**

### **a. Competing schools**

- Cerritos Community College
- Fresno City College
- Citrus Community College
- Glendale Community College
- Long Beach Community College
- Moorpark Community College

- San Jose City College

### **i. Their program examples**

- **Cyprus Community College:** Basic Skills and First Year Experience (Linked/cluster fully coordinated but taught separately).
- **Cerritos Community College:** First Year Experience/Basic Skills/General Education/Transfer Courses
- **Fresno City College:** Technology Focused (Linked courses taught separately).
- **Glendale Community College:** Achieving College Excellence: Linked or cluster courses taught separately.
- **Long Beach Community College:** Students Achieving Goals in English as a Second Language (Non-native speakers in a coordinated series of courses mainly in English and Mathematics).
- **Moorpark Community College:** Coordinated studies of two or more fully embedded courses (Thematic).
- **San Jose City College:** Team-taught, two or more fully embedded courses.

### **ii. How they market**

- Develop a marketing plan
- Market to critical audiences: students, counselors and advisors, faculty, and administrators
- Service learning
- Foundation
- Grant writers
- Student orientations
- Public information Office
- Registrar/Matriculation/Admissions
- Placement center
- High school visits to campus
- Have dedicated room with signage
- Design a website
- Design a brochure

### **iii. Their costs if available**

- No direct information available.
- All examples have a Learning Community Coordinator and most of them have an Advisory Committee.
- Participating faculty gets a stipend for meeting with other faculty for coordination.

### **iv. Recommendations of what to look out for**

- Faculty feel like they are not teaching all aspects of course
- Activities may be non-traditional and people feel uncomfortable.
- Learning may come in spurts, although greater knowledge does occur, some may feel that they are not learning.
- Decrease flexibility in students schedules
- Causes greater commitment on the part of students
- Scheduling conflicts for students, teachers, rooms
- MIS problems regarding registration
- Cannot ensure that all course objectives will be met due to greater flexibility
- Fatigue due to longer sessions
- Students may feel overwhelmed by combined assignments
- Group members do not always contribute equally
- Some may feel uneasy in such a hands-on learning environment
- Time consuming for all. Instructors may feel uncomfortable working with other instructors this closely—watching style, methods, etc.
- Resources/Physical space
- Gaining campus-wide acceptance

## **D. Implementation Summary**

### **a. Timeline**

#### **i. Cluster**

#### **ii. Field Studies**

#### **iii. Residential**

#### **○ Budget**

- **Cluster**
- **Field Studies**

- **Residential**
  - **Stakeholders**
  - **Marketing**
- E. Plans for the future of the programs**
  - a. Assessment/Reassessment**
  - b. Future needs**
    - i. Staffing**
    - ii. Resources**
  - c. Exit strategy**
- F. Challenges and Considerations**
- G. Appendices**

# Business Plan

## Learning Communities

### I. Introduction

#### *Business Description*

The district is necessarily concerned with improving the retention and success rates of our students. It has been known for a long time that learning communities help students succeed and even thrive by increasing student involvement and motivation, and by enhancing student emotional and intellectual development, which lead to increased retention and student success. Students that are involved in learning communities are more intellectually mature and responsible for their own learning and develop the capacity to care about the learning of their peers. Faculty members involved in learning communities collaborate more with each other and build mentoring relationships with students that last. These programs also offer a robust way to address interdisciplinary pedagogical ideas and a more coherent pathway to engage students in a vibrant and cohesive general education curriculum. Residential learning communities like the field studies program can make a difference by building a culture of engagement for students and by nurturing the establishment of meaningful relationships with all involved.

College of the Canyons (COC) plans for the future. As an institution of higher learning, it is responsive to the needs of its students and community. The results of this forward vision, whether it is curriculum, program or facility development is insightful, innovative, and progressive. COC, like hundreds of colleges nationwide, is facing the challenge of receiving greater numbers of students unprepared in basic reading, writing, and math skills. These students enter college-level courses and find that they are unable to meet the academic rigor needed to succeed, while faculty feels torn to address these concerns yet teach to the content of the course. In contrast, there are students who excel in these skills and are seeking greater challenges in their academic training, while working with students with shared interests and abilities. Hence, campuses are faced with meeting the varied learning levels, styles, and skills of their student populations. Learning Communities (LC) provide a well-recognized means to meet this academic duality found, in particular, between College Skills and Honors students. Learning Communities provide academically enriched environments, which benefit both students and faculty. The academic outcomes of Learning Communities are well known; they, for example, increase student retention rates, encourage academic achievement, emphasize motivation and involvement, improve time of degree completion, and enhance intellectual development. And, with regard to faculty, LC's create classroom learning based on co-teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration, and experiential learning. Learning Communities encourage *Engagement, Progress, and Success*. Learning Communities involve several models, one of which is the Cluster. Model defined simply as: *A cohort of*

*students who enroll in two or more courses, taking them together following a specific schedule.* This arrangement typically includes clustering two or more different classes back-to-back taught by a team of interdisciplinary instructors.

Various models and methods exist, including the following:

**Linked activities** require linking at least two courses together. Collaboration requires co-planning by instructors and co-learning by students or the sharing of assignments from the linked courses. This activity allows students to learn across two or more disciplines and see the interconnectedness of both. Link assignments, for example, might include teaching of the Sociology of the Family along with Honors English whereby instructors teach from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* or Introduction to Psychology with Introduction to Biology and *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* is used.

**Linked courses** involve linking two or more courses together and involves co-planning by instructors, co-enrollment in courses. Co-teaching of selected activities or of the entire class, as well as co-learning on the part of both instructors and students.

**Seamless courses** include the above but also involve the continual participation of both instructors in all courses. Creates load issues; however, provides the additional area of co-assessment. This aspect of collaborative learning increases in this model as well as the fact that all members are acting as a learning team.

***Making it work:***

- Instructors need to connect with each other daily, as well as engage in “debriefing” sessions.
- Maintain a daily log which identifies and states activities, events, reflections, suggestions, as well as problems.
- Keep a folder of all handouts and notes as a frame of reference.
- Conduct classroom research (e.g. pre-test and post-test), as well as invite outside observers. These qualitative measures will assist in the overall evaluation of the project. Assess writing skills, skills demonstrations, etc.
- Provide overall assessment measures, including assessing the attitudes and beliefs of students and instructors.
- Collect student evaluations, comments, as well as interview students and faculty and develop focus groups.
- Evaluate and continue process, as well as identify ongoing participants and develop curriculum models.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The college has many different goals and objectives that affect various aspects of the institution; however, the creation of Learning Community models specifically affects the quality and success of instruction. With the development of these communities, the following goals will be addressed.

### **Goals**

To create a long-term instructional model called Learning Communities which will address a variety of “linked” instructional formats that will offer diversity and depth of course materials in an interdisciplinary learning environment to various student populations. In doing so, academic knowledge and critical thinking skills will increase, as will student success and retention through an emphasis of experiential learning. It is through this instructional mode that student involvement will increase as a result of collaborative learning between students, teachers, and community. In addition, as Learning Communities grow in size, so will their general interest among students; hence, resulting in great FTES for the college. At this point, the overall plan of action concerning LC’s at College of the Canyons includes beginning a pilot project during fall semester 2008. These goals will be met by engaging in the following objectives.

### **Objectives**

#### **By participating in learning communities students will:**

- Create curricular coherence
- Foster student engagement
- Make it relevant, life-long, and responsive to change
- Connect goals, careers and professions
- Stimulate a collaborative and supportive relationship among students and faculty
- Discover self and society
- Become part of the social and academic life at the College of the Canyons
- Improve retention and academic achievement
- Increase motivation
- Improve time to degree completion
- Enhance intellectual development

#### **And, with regard to a LC model at COC, students will be able to:**

- Address college skills strategies and techniques
- Engage in applied or experiential learning through field studies
- Participate in an honors-level cohort

### **Implementation of Goals and Objectives:**

#### **Plan for Year One:**

- Recognize as beginning stages of interdisciplinary, collaborative pilot program.

- Create cluster model.
- Formulate thematic model.
- Review existing field studies model.
- Organize at least one cluster or thematic model to implement for fall 2008.
- Select appropriate courses.
- Identify faculty participants/cohorts.
- Design and offer Professional Development workshops related to Learning Communities and determine faculty training needs.
- Develop, design, and disseminate marketing resources and materials.
- Determine registration process.
- Advertise through appropriate outreach channels.
- Work with Counseling Department to determine student selection process.
- Establish an Advisory Board.
- Identify problems.
- Meet with Administration, PIO, Academic Affairs, Instruction, Counseling, and COCFA to determine registration, marketing, scheduling, instructional, counseling or union issues.
- Consider operating costs and whether additional funding sources must be examined, as well as unexpected/unanticipated risks.
- Integrate community partners into models.

### **Plan for Years Two to Five:**

- Set program into place.
- Identify key courses and participating faculty.
- Rotate class offerings, as well as models.
- Formalize an entire Learning Community Program, including curriculum and faculty.
- Continue to build on course selections and number of sections offered.
- Expand models to include, career technical education, online, non-credit, etc.
- Develop new curriculum, if needed.
- Formalize both a College Skills and Honors Program.
- Provide a Learning Community half-time faculty director or fulltime coordinator.
- Identify a greater number of community partners.
- Increase number of field study sites.
- Link models to Educational Travel options.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Learning Communities program is to create an environment where students can develop intellectual and academic skills through a well-organized interdisciplinary core of courses to create greater curricular coherence with a group of

faculty achieving a coordinated effort of leadership and excellence to deliver the best academic preparation.

## **Vision Statement**

### **Vision:**

The vision of the Learning Communities program is to promote student ownership of their learning experience and to encourage life-long study through high quality formal and informal, educational experiences.

## **Company Summary**

College of the Canyons is one of the fastest growing community colleges in California. It is presently the single college in the Santa Clarita Community College District, governed by a locally elected board of trustees. The campus, located adjacent to Interstate 5, just 35 miles north of Los Angeles, serves the rapidly growing communities in Santa Clarita. The college draws students from a 367 square mile area within its capture boundaries as well as students from adjacent areas. The staff includes 162 full-time faculty; 385 adjunct faculty; 16 educational administrators; 24 classified administrators and 179 support staff members.

The college's programs enable students to pursue their potential, contribute to the quality of life in the community and support the economic development of the area. The college provides opportunities in post-secondary education for students seeking transfer programs, technical/vocational programs, basic skills education and retraining opportunities.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the creation of a junior college district in California's Santa Clarita Valley in November 1967, and elected a five-member Board of Trustees. By the next summer, the board hired the first Superintendent-President, Dr. Robert C. Rockwell, who opened College of the Canyons on September 28, 1969, with 800 students attending classes in temporary quarters at Hart High School in Newhall.

Over the years, the college Board of Trustees and district administration have been building according to the college's master plan to accommodate the facility needs of current and future student populations. The current student population is nearing 13,000 per semester and the college is expected to continue to grow with a projected enrollment of 21,000 students by the year 2010.

Under the leadership of Dr. Dianne Van Hook since 1988, the college has aggressively sought funding wherever it could be found and has successfully met the facilities demands necessitated by rapid growth. Some modular office and classroom buildings have been brought onto campus to handle the surge pending the completion of permanent buildings.

The college broke ground on a new 950-seat Performing Arts Center in partnership with the City of Santa Clarita in December 2001 and the building should be completed in 2003. Fundraising is currently underway to build a University Center that will house

prominent universities and bring bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees to the campus. Seven universities are already offering over a dozen programs in an interim center on the campus and enrollment in those programs has been overwhelming.

Voters approved an \$82.1 million bond measure in November 2001 that will bring more classrooms to the COC campus to accommodate the growth predictions for the school. It is anticipated that 13 or more projects will be able to be built with this money.

In the fall of 2001, an additional classroom site was opened in Canyon Country at the Canyon Country Library. The site consists of three classrooms, one computer lab and one "smart" classroom. This new site, called Canyon Country ACCESS, brings college classes to a part of the community where many of our students live -- easing the commute and making going to college a little easier for many students.

### **Learning Community Summary**

College of the Canyons has attempted a Learning Communities arrangement twice in the past. The first involved linking three basic skills classes together; and, the second, connecting one transfer-level course with Service-Learning. In the first case, there wasn't an "anchor" (e.g. transfer-level) course to entice students; and, in the second case, students failed to see the benefit or relationship of the intersection of these two courses. Nevertheless, these attempts provided valuable information to assist in future planning and have illustrated the importance of recognizing inter-departmental and campus-wide planning. More important, however, is the fact that over the past three years, a paradigm shift has emerged education, which currently emphasizes the importance of community service (e.g. Service-Learning) and college skills training through cooperative, collaborative, and experiential learning. In fact, the COC Basic Skills Task Force Committee is currently addressing the California Basic Skills Initiative, which requires institutional commitment to increasing support of college skills services. Hence, the time is right to create Learning Communities that will address the above areas and target specific audiences, specifically through 9-12 unit course clusters (e.g. on-ground and online classes) offered during prime-time on either a two-or three-day format designed around College Skills or Honors courses.

In higher education learning communities are classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students. A variety of approaches are used to build these learning communities, with all intended to create meaningful learning experiences that build community among students, between students and their instructors, and among faculty members and disciplines. Research shows that successful learning communities increase student retention rates, encourage academic achievement, emphasize motivation and involvement, improve time of degree completion, and enhance intellectual development. They also encourage Engagement, Progress, and Success. Below are 3 models that

would work well at College of the Canyons. These are just three models.

### ***Cluster Model***

The Cluster Model will specifically create College Skills and Honors Learning Communities. These communities will create well-designed academic settings that will emphasize issues of cooperation, diversity, responsibility, reciprocity, interaction, and expectation among students and faculty. The College Skills cluster will address the specific needs of “at risk” students and develop both academic and life-skills needed to succeed. In contrast, the Honors cluster will create an academically enhanced setting to build on already present academic and life-skills. The students will be involved in civic involvement, while contributing service to their community.

### ***Field Studies/Residential Model***

*Field Studies* allow students to live in dorm type settings for a short amount of time while taking a mixture of courses. Taking the courses off campus provide an experiential dimension. Offering an off site summer bridge program for incoming students would give students a chance to bond and experience multiple group activities while learning about the college and what is required of our successful students. It is anticipated that the college would provide week-long, and weekend field studies opportunities at the facility.

*Student Preparation/Advisement, Program Emphasis and a recreation* component will all be taught. Orientation workshops will be offered prior to the class so that students receive needed information on what will be expected and what to bring.

### ***Thematic Model***

This is one of the more popular models where a set of two or more courses are grouped together with a common theme. The instructors coordinate content and assignments related to the theme that is taken by same group of students. The examples below include current courses in our Educational Travel Program.

## **Management Team**

- Us
- Bios and backgrounds
- Describe areas we are working in
- How we will provide outreach

Initial team will expand into an Advisory Board, including representatives from Academic Affairs, Office of Instruction, Counseling, PIO, Outreach, Service-Learning, as well as at least one instructional dean and one department chair. This team will coordinate the program in the beginning; however, once established, a faculty coordinator will be requested, first at 20 percent release. And, once the program becomes established, a faculty coordinator would be requested to provide assistance at 50 percent release time.

## **Start-Up Summary**

Initial buy-in  
Groups needed  
Structure plan at the start  
Work of instructors and deans  
Schedule in classes  
Work with PIO, AR and Counselors  
Teams will be primary facilitator  
Outreach, pr  
Faculty requirements  
Faculty training (work through Professional Development)  
Stipends  
Market costs  
Letting classes run with fewer numbers  
Outreach materials  
Timeline

Later

Formally structured in divisions  
Identify classes, possibly rotate  
Work directly with chairs and deans  
Formalize program with a coordinator or LC Advisory Committee  
Faculty, dean, counselor  
Who could determine need?

Maintain constant contact with division deans  
Create separate section in schedule and catalog  
Designate with course prefixes  
Designate with special logo or icon  
Website

## **Locations and Facilities**

VAL and CCC  
Field sites  
Later, online, non-credit  
Run at HS –orientations  
LCs will require standard classrooms  
Some may require labs/computers  
Coordination will occur with chairs, deans and Academic Affairs

Non-Credit and Community Education  
HS—work with existing outreach coordinator with Hart District  
Field studies will require additional sites  
Travel studies will require additional sites  
Will be worked out ahead of time  
Travel arrangements?  
Site locations?  
Key site contacts? How determined?

## **Products and Services**

Competitive  
Service-oriented  
Provide a variety of lc models to be offered to a diverse student population  
Provide product:  
Variety  
Interest  
Take care of GE  
Time  
Interest  
Competitive \$  
Competitive times  
Competitive courses  
Competitive kinds of learning communities  
Skilled teachers  
Interesting site

Service:  
Counselors  
Direct contact with instructors  
Counselors  
Cohorts  
“applied” learning/experiential  
early registration—incentives  
continued contact with instructor  
early alert re grades  
team work  
collaborative learning

Reception  
Notation  
certificate

## **The Competition**

List of other college in area that have learning communities. Provide types, etc.  
El Camino College

Moorpark College  
Cypress College

## **Strategy and Implementation**

Field studies classes  
Counselors  
Hs students/outreach  
College skills  
Honors  
Classes  
Divisions  
Offer a variety of courses and modes  
Offer a variety of experiences  
Work directly with counselor  
Work within our district/hs/outreach  
Identify clients via surveys, adults, hs student outreach  
Contact hs counselors  
Note advantages in the schedule  
College day  
Adv in schedule  
Adv in HITE , student services  
With counselors

Create a sep brochure  
Create a college visitation day  
Visit individual classroom at HS, COC

Discuss at department and division meeting  
Schedule website—sep listing for LRNCOM classes

## **Sales Strategy and Promotion**

Advantage of learning communities  
Advantages to students, teachers, and college  
Benefits re retention  
In and out  
Better understanding of subject  
Greater assistance in learning subject  
Increased and open communication with instructors  
Positive learning experience, greater knowledge of how to use resources  
Improve communication and critical thinking skills in a group setting.  
Greater academic college success  
Meet friends  
Stead progress towards degree  
Active learning

Greater personal development  
Create networks and integrate faster  
Better grades  
Better transition to college for freshman  
Acquiring needed skills necessary for success  
Active participant in one's own learning  
Leadership, problem-solving and critical thinking skills  
Experiencing various learning approaches, good for varied learning styles  
Satisfying GE courses  
Increasing literacy skills  
Increasing knowledge and commitment to the community

(If connected to a First Year Experiences,  
Learning skills, time management, note-taking, active reading, test-taking, oral presentations, library, research, and computer skills

Knowledge of campus resources  
Exploration of majors and career paths  
Diversity issues, culture and ethics  
Transition and wellness issues  
College history, culture, policies  
Exposure to academic, performing, and athletic events

Benefits  
Beneficial for at-risk students  
Provides an intensive and supportive learning environment  
Increases completion  
Encourages taking core classes early in college  
Allows certain topics to be covered in greater depth and to recognize interdisciplinary connections  
Motivates, inspires, empowers  
Assignment coordination is good  
Creates a sense of community  
Instructors get to know students better  
Greater ability to evaluate and assess—let students know early  
Students get to know instructors better and develop a greater rapport with them  
Social support network develops—between faculty and students  
Instructors enjoy working together as a team. Creating related assignments.  
Allows for greater energy and connection between faculty members.  
Short-term  
Number of units  
Time convenience  
Working adults  
Student-centered  
Benefits:

Adv of learning communities  
Student, teacher, college  
Greater retention  
Time in and out  
Short timer  
Number of unites/GE requirements  
Community service  
Honor core  
Field experience  
Time  
Working adults  
Time blocks  
Convenience  
Student-centered  
Experiential learning  
Out faster  
More likely to stay with program/college  
Greater numbers graduate with cohort model  
Greater satisfaction with education.  
Prefix and group into cluster or themes:

Adventures in Higher Education  
Law and Order  
Page, Stage, and Screen  
Communicating with Ethics  
Politics of Social Problems

## **Financial Statements and Analysis**

Field  
Outside costs at site  
Laundry, food, general expenses.

Costs—each student as an FTES receives \$\$\$  
If run with lower class sizes, financial hit  
Projected enrollment

## **Sales Forecast**

## **Timeline**

## **Marketing**

The success of the Cluster Model is based on the concept of *learning cohorts*. In other words, it is imperative to formulate student cohorts (especially among in-coming high school students) before classes begin; hence, this will rely on “getting the word” out to new and returning students. Recruitment is key to ensuring the success of Learning Communities. In particular, it will mean advertising directly to high school counselors, faculty, and students. This will require the joint assistance of both campuses, as well as the offices of Admissions and Records, Counseling, Student Services, and Instruction. Faculty liaisons will also provide a connection with both institutions. It will also require the work of the Public Information Office and its ability to promote the program through printed and online services, as well as by community updates (e.g. news articles). This would include postings on the general campus homepage, as well as a separate LC homepage. Promotion will also occur through division and department announcements to faculty and students, as well as through student clubs and the Associated Student Government (ASG) Office. The TLC will also provide a venue whereby the benefits of specific LC’s can be shared with students. Finally, a *Learning Communities Handbook* will provide more information and will be shared at outreach events like SCV College Day or during LC Orientation Meetings. Finally, a theme like *First Year Experience* will weave its way through the College Skills cluster, which would allow this LC to expand beyond academic training only.

### **Marketing Goals and Strategies:**

- Develop a marketing plan
- Market to critical audiences: students, counselors and advisors, faculty, and administrators
- Webmasters
- Service learning
- Foundation
- Grant writers
- Student orientations
- Public information Office
- Registrar/Matriculation/Admissions
- Placement center
- High school visits to campus
- Have dedicated room with signage
- Design a website

### **Marketing to the Faculty:**

- Stipends
- Release time
- Professional development (FLEX) credit
- Class size reduction

## **Stakeholders**

The stakeholders involved in this project are many. They not only include College Skills and Honors students, but potentially transfer-level students, as well as career technical education students. Faculty, administrators, and counselors are involved, as is staff from the TLC, Student Services, Academic Affairs, Office of Institutional Development, and Grants Development. In addition, individuals and departments of the Hart District who will assist in forming cohorts. Additional departments/committees at COC involved or affected will include the Office of Instruction, Payroll, Fiscal Services, Academic Senate, Curriculum Committee, Instructional Divisions and Departments, and COCFA,

## ***Business Philosophies***

## ***Geographic Market***

This would be the student population—who

## ***Vision of the Future***

## **II. Background**

College of the Canyons has attempted a Learning Communities arrangement twice in the past. The first involved linking three basic skills classes together; and, the second, connecting one transfer-level course with Service-Learning. In the first case, there wasn't an "anchor" (e.g. transfer-level) course to entice students; and, in the second case, students failed to see the benefit or relationship of the intersection of these two courses. Nevertheless, these attempts provided valuable information to assist in future planning and have illustrated the importance of recognizing inter-departmental and campus-wide planning. More important, however, is the fact that over the past three years, a paradigm shift has emerged education, which currently emphasizes the importance of community service (e.g. Service-Learning) and college skills training through cooperative, collaborative, and experiential learning. In fact, the COC Basic Skills Task Force

Committee is currently addressing the California Basic Skills Initiative, which requires institutional commitment to increasing support of college skills services. Hence, the time is right to create Learning Communities that will address the above areas and target specific audiences, specifically through 9-12 unit course clusters (e.g. on-ground and on line classes) offered during prime-time on either a two-or three-day format designed around College Skills or Honors courses.

The district will be actively involved in developing a field studies program to provide educational opportunities and programs that can provide an experiential dimension. As currently envisioned, the district will develop a partnership with the Boy Scout Council of Long Beach. The district would lease the summer camp facility, Camp Tahquitz, located in the Barton Flats area of the San Bernardino Mountains. In addition to a bridge program for incoming students, it is anticipated that the college would provide week-long, and weekend field studies opportunities at the facility. Orientation workshops will be necessary for students to gather information on what will be expected and what to bring.

**Background:**

In higher education, curricular learning communities are classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students.

Learning communities started in 1927 by Professor Alex Meiklejohn in Wisconsin. He required students in their second year of college to compare their first year Greek literature course to their second year American literature. The students were then required to connect these ideas and write a paper during the summer. Although this practice lasted only 6 years, it provided the foundation for the learning communities as we know them today.

There are five major models in existence in many institutions. It has been found that a single model is not as beneficial as if using bits and pieces from two or three models. The five models are: Linked courses, learning clusters, federated communities (Thematic), freshman interest groups, and coordinated studies.

**III. Vision/Mission/Objectives**

To address the varied academic needs of students, the District desires to create a Learning Community, specifically a Cluster Model, to begin fall semester 2008. The overall goal of this project is to establish a Learning Communities Program, which would facilitate a variety of models (e.g. Thematic, Field Studies, etc.) throughout the curriculum. In addition, the program would integrate a variety of teaching modalities, as well as an interdisciplinary selection of courses and representative faculty from many disciplines. The Cluster Model will specifically create College Skills and Honors Learning Communities. These communities will create well-designed academic settings that will emphasize issues of cooperation, diversity, responsibility, reciprocity, interaction, and expectation among students and faculty. The College Skills cluster will address the

specific needs of “at risk” students and develop both academic and life-skills needed to succeed. In contrast, the Honors cluster will create an academically enhanced setting to build on already present academic and life-skills. In addition, however, these students will participate in civic involvement, while contributing service to their community. If successful, the Cluster Model will be used to create Transfer and GE Learning Communities, as well as Career Technical Education clusters. Virtual Learning Communities are also a possibility, as the college develops more online offerings.

These peer cohorts will help turn a potential “faceless” experience in a large college setting into one where a student creates personal relationships with fellow students and faculty and staff. While learning communities can be fostered on campus, it can be a somewhat limiting experience. Experience has shown that deeper, more cohesive learning communities can be nurtured if they are introduced in a residential experience. In a residential setting, students will be able to grow and bond far beyond the limits imposed by the classroom walls.

## **Timeline**

Planning of this model would best occur during the 2009-2010 academic year, since it will require planning and coordination with the local high school district, as well as leave time for adequate planning and implementation at COC of faculty/course development and marketing requests. (This is especially true of the College Skills cluster.) However, a pilot cohort involving the Honors cluster could occur as early as fall 2008, since the nature of the students and content is different than those of the College Skills cluster.

## **Budget**

The main concern regarding Learning Communities is the compensation of faculty. The LC model is based on co-teaching, which is best accomplished by “linking” two to three classes back-to-back. Each class represents a different discipline; however, the courses, while representing different disciplines are connected by a common project or theme. In addition, faculty work together to co-teach within this collaborative, as well as cooperative learning environment. This means that faculty typically stays in the classroom for the full teaching block, even though they may not be teaching directly. The other issue involves the Office of Instruction and its approval of such classes, since LC modules are typically capped at 25 students; hence, such classes are more expensive to run. In addition, as the program grows, a Faculty Coordinator (at a minimum, later on maybe a Director) will be needed. All successful Learning Communities agree that

without the coordinator the process of organizing, scheduling, and overseeing the LCs is not possible.

Issues regarding faculty compensation will have to be arranged with the Office of Instruction, as well as load issues with COCFA. The Faculty Coordinator could be paid with a stipend. And, as the program grows and additional faculty are asked to participate in Learning Communities, it is wise to offer additional Professional Development workshops, activities, as well as guest presentations--all of which will require additional funding. Additional financial support will be required to assist the added services of the TLC and Counseling Department.

## **Examples**

Units vary for each grouping, depending on courses taken, as well as if a lab component is attached. Note that there is an “anchor” class, which provides at least 3 to 4-units of transfer credit.

### ***Honors Cluster Model***

(Would eventually include online offerings.)

- Sociology 101H (4-units)
- Communications Studies 105H (3-units)
- English 101H (4-units)
- Service-Learning 100 (1-unit)

Title

Times of courses

Section course title time instructor location

Title of section

- Anthropology 103H (3-units)
  - Biology 107 H (proposed--4-units)
  - Geography 101H (3-units)
  - Geography 101H Lab (1-unit)
  - Service-Learning 100 (1-unit)
- Political Science 150H (3-units)
  - History 111H (3-units)
  - English 101H (4-units)
  - Service-Learning 100 (1-unit)

### ***College Skills Cluster Model***

- ESL 070 (3-units)

- English 081 (3-units)
- Counseling 060 (1-4-units)
- Sociology 101 (3-units)
  
- Math 058 (5-units) or Math 059 (4-units)
- English 094 (3-units)
- Counseling 060 (1-4-units)
- Sociology 101 (3-units)
  
- Math 060 (5-units)
- English 094 (3-units)
- Geology 101 (3-units)
- Geology 101 Lab (1-unit)

The success of the Cluster Model is based on the concept of *learning cohorts*. In other words, it is imperative to formulate student cohorts (especially among in-coming high school students) before classes begin; hence, this will rely on “getting the word” out to new and returning students. Recruitment is key to ensuring the success of Learning Communities. In particular, it will mean advertising directly to high school counselors, faculty, and students. This will require the joint assistance of both campuses, as well as the offices of Admissions and Records, Counseling, Student Services, and Instruction. Faculty liaisons will also provide a connection with both institutions. It will also require the work of the Public Information Office and its ability to promote the program through printed and online services, as well as by community updates (e.g. news articles). This would include postings on the general campus homepage, as well as a separate LC homepage. Promotion will also occur through division and department announcements to faculty and students, as well as through student clubs and the Associated Student Government (ASG) Office. The TLC will also provide a venue whereby the benefits of specific LC’s can be shared with students. Finally, a *Learning Communities Handbook* will provide more information and will be shared at outreach events like SCV College Day or during LC Orientation Meetings. Finally, a theme like *First Year Experience* will weave its way through the College Skills cluster, which would allow this LC to expand beyond academic training only.

## **Challenges/ Risks/Exit Strategy**

Field:

Both

Faculty feel like they are not teaching all aspects of course

Have to modify

Activities may be non-traditional and people feel uncomfortable.

Learning may come in spurts, although greater knowledge does occur, some may feel that they are not learning.

Overall challenges:

Decrease flexibility in students schedules

Causes greater commitment on the part of students

Scheduling conflicts for students, teachers, rooms

MIS problems regarding registration

Cannot ensure that all course objectives will be met due to greater flexibility

Fatigue due to longer sessions

Students may feel overwhelmed by combined assignments

Group members do not always contribute equally

Some may feel uneasy in such a hands-on learning environment

Time consuming for all. Instructors may feel uncomfortable working with other instructors this closely—watching style, methods, etc.

### **Risk Management:**

#### **Challenges**

The learning community idea is simple to conceive of, but actually complex and demanding to carry out. Whether learning communities are in their earliest experimental phase on a campus, or are becoming predictable features of the curriculum, they face continuous challenges.

**The challenges of team teaching.** Although both students and faculty have been energized by most learning communities, especially those programs that involve team teaching, these results have not been uniform across the board with all learning communities or students. Merely linking up courses or team teaching to an interdisciplinary theme does not ensure an integrated whole - or the creation of a community.

While there are no simple formulas, what works in general in undergraduate classrooms also seems to work in learning communities: high degrees of student involvement and active learning, engagement of students in ideas and projects that are personally meaningful, high expectations of student work, and timely and detailed feedback on that work. These programs work when both faculty and students pay attention to both the academic and social connections that the learning community structure invites. They work best when there are explicit efforts at integration and synthesis relative to program themes, and careful attention to building community in terms of inclusion, communication, participation, responsibility and reflection on the part of all learners.

There's no question that such programs require extensive collaborative planning and conscientious work. Colleges committed to team teaching models (and, as well, course clusters that are planned but not taught together) must find ongoing ways to support

faculty members in this work. This means making continuous efforts to attract faculty members new to learning communities, building teaching teams so that experience and wisdom are passed along, and encouraging both planning and reflective time so that teams can learn the most from their partnerships.

**The challenge of situating learning communities relative to the larger curricula of the college.**

Are learning communities supplementary to prescribed curricula, and do they therefore live alongside it? Or, do learning communities incorporate prescribed courses? Or, do they take the place of sets of courses or prescribed content? Put another way, can required courses or general education out-comes be included in learning community designs? How, then, are these programs described to students? The point here is not that learning community efforts need to become large-scale, or situated in only one arena of the college curriculum. Indeed, many learning community offerings are modest in size but are neither marginal nor ephemeral. No matter what scale they take, healthy learning community efforts must have a clear rationale in terms of their curricular purposes and student clientele, and in terms of the larger curricular landscape of the campus.

**The challenge of administrative support.** Administratively, learning community structures call for communication and collaboration across many campus units. Deans and division or department chairs, librarians, admissions recruiters, academic advisers, the registrar, designers of the course schedule, schedulers of classroom space, residence life staff, service learning offices - all might be involved at various stages of learning community planning and implementation. To strengthen cross-campus communication about learning communities and share administrative details, many campuses have created learning community steering committees. Additionally, several colleges have given a faculty member a part-time assignment as a learning community coordinator. Whether learning communities are just starting on campuses or long established, these programs are almost always unfamiliar to students and go against the grain of established procedures. Therefore, healthy learning community enrollment depends critically on academic advisers and savvy ways of marshaling appropriate administrative support.

**The challenge of assessment.** What distinguishes learning communities as an innovation is their great flexibility. They present a structure that teachers can take in myriad directions to engage different student audiences, to examine academic content and issues from a variety of perspectives and to realize diverse educational goals. A thousand learning community flowers have bloomed, not only in Washington but beyond. However, the challenge now is to sustain and improve what has begun. We need to harvest more of the fruits of learning community efforts and continue to disseminate them, while at the same time strive to understand more deeply how to improve our work. Assessment must play a critical role in understanding and improving learning communities. Just as there is no single learning community model, there is no single approach for meeting these challenges. Each of your campuses is addressing these needs in your own way.

Non-Field:

Fewer students/less FTES

Cancellation classes

Loss of income

Load issues

Room changes

Sequence may be broken

Registration problems

Partners bailing out

Turn into none lc classes

Redirect faculty and student

Take on as overloads in the beginning.

Administrative:

Scheduling conflicts for teachers, small classes, rooms, scheduling issues.

Advisors have to play a key role in communicating the nature of Laces and what is expected.

MIS problems

Oversight of registration

Union issues

Adjunct or fulltime? If adjunct, how paid?

### ***Pricing***

### ***SWOT Analysis***

Model UN

Vets project

Create initiative stipend/reward

## **IV. Appendices**

**Money**

**Grants**

Federal Government

[www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)

California Postsecondary Education Commission

[www.cpec.ca.gov/](http://www.cpec.ca.gov/)

American Association of Community Colleges

[www.aacc.nche.edu/](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/)

Department of Education

[www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocfo/grants/grants/html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocfo/grants/grants/html)

California Department of Education

[www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)

[www.pasadena.edu/externalrelations/TLC/funding-sources.cfm](http://www.pasadena.edu/externalrelations/TLC/funding-sources.cfm)

California Community Colleges System Office

[www.ccco.edu](http://www.ccco.edu)

State Chancellor's Grants

Conferences

[www.lc.iastate.edu/LCConferences.html](http://www.lc.iastate.edu/LCConferences.html)