Online Learning: How to Engage the Millennial Generation

by Guillermo Acosta

Creating engaging learning environments is, for me, a fascinating issue that has kept me busy for the last little while. The answer is elusive and, of course, not unique. Also, there are several approaches that can be taken; however, after countless hours dedicated to this matter I have identified a few issues that have proven to be very successful.

In addition to some common practices that we can borrow from what we have learned from developing other successful online customer experiences in the private sector, such as good content, relevant interactivity, and user-friendly navigation, there are certain features that I consider particularly important when designing an engaging online education experience.

It is important to design a learner-centered environment; in that sense, we need to thoroughly understand the student "fears" associated with online education. The idea is to take effective measures to help them overcome those barriers. There are a couple of very common concerns expressed by students. First, lack of social interaction: "This is not for me; I need to be in a classroom because I would miss the social interaction". Second, lack of self-discipline: "I wouldn't know what to do, I would feel lost. I don't have the discipline to do this".

Based on experience, I have identified five core characteristics that every online course must have. The goal is to reduce the impact of those fears and thereby enhance students' engagement and increase their likelihood of success.

1. Develop a strong virtual community to foster a sense of belonging:

It is surprising for many students how active and rewarding the online interaction can be. In order to achieve this, it is vital to create a strong virtual community that provides that sense of belonging and inspires students to come back for more. Having a knowledgeable moderator providing timely responses that effectively address the issues raised by the students is critical, especially in the initial stage of the experience. But this is only one part of the picture. The other part is to have a sizeable number of participants posting a critical mass of messages. This keeps the levels of interest high and fosters interaction among community members.

Editor's Note:

Earlier this year we conducted a survey of our readership to determine specific topics to include in future editions of UPDATE. This issue focuses on the broad category of the Learning Centered Community College, a popular choice among those who responded. Two articles in this edition were written by personnel from two of the 12 Vanguard Learning Colleges, designated by the League for Innovation in the Community College in 2000. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions about current and future editions of this newsletter.

This issue and back issues of UPDATE can be found on the web at:
http://occrl.ed.uiuc.edu.

Online courses can be structured in a way that can be surprisingly similar to the in-classroom experience. As a matter of fact, very often the quality of the contributions of the group is higher in the online environment, because the participants not only will have more time to structure their ideas, but also because in an online course everything is in written form, so that what you "say" will stay there and can be read for weeks by the whole group.

Providing a human touch helps the learner overcome the barrier of "lack of social interaction"; therefore, when designing your online environment, put a "face" to your web site. It's all about bonding with the online environment. Students like to know who they are interacting with. Include your picture and some information for them to know that you actually are a human being! You could incorporate a short introductory video, or, to be up-to-date with technology you may consider using "Podcasting". Make a graded assignment (or bonus marks) for them to create their personal homepage in the first week, or upload photographs of students enrolled in the class. All of these factors will help them relate to the course and feel more comfortable with the whole experience.

2. Demonstrate high-levels of responsiveness to meet your learners' expectations:

To understand what responsiveness means today, you need to understand your audience. Most often you will be teaching to the "Millennial Generation". For this generation "instant gratification" is a big part of their lifestyle. You just need to take a look at what is available out there: "24/7"; instant messaging, in all its possible combinations; instant download, for almost every digital product or service; video on demand; Blogs; Tivo; and most recently, so-called Podcasts. Moreover, this is a generation that has been raised by "helicopter parents": parents always hovering to solve all problems for their kids. Therefore, a common question of this generation is: "What can you do for me?" As you can imagine, the expectations are high. To deal with this, I make a point of answering questions or requests within 24 hours; however, I usually check the course's site more than once a day. My advice in this area is to set realistic expectations from the start. In your introductory message to the course, indicate your availability and response times for answering messages and grading assignments.

3. Provide timely, meaningful, and personalized feedback:

Recognition and rewards encourage the participants to come back for more. Therefore, identify those students that will keep your community alive and motivate them by rewarding their contributions to the virtual community. Once somebody has had the courage to post her thoughts in writing in front of a group, she expects her effort to be recognized, especially if it is

clearly above average. Your feedback doesn't have to be extensive, but it has to be meaningful; avoid standard answers, identify key areas of students' work, and indicate what they should continue doing and the areas for improvement. Personalizing your feedback should go beyond including the name of the student in your response. Including some references to the student's previous postings not only shows your involvement with the virtual community, but also shows that you really care.

4. Create a highly-structured online environment to keep the learner on track and focused in the course:

Providing a clear structure from the start is essential for the success of most students in an online learning environment. The course must be designed in a way that the students have easy access to a single source of information about what is expected from them in every stage of the experience. Providing a highly structured environment with weekly milestones and activities allows the students to keep track of the course and their progress.

Keep them on track by providing frequent reminders of the upcoming activities and milestones. There are four specific actions that I take in this regard: **Include a "critical path"**, which is a one-page, quick snapshot of what is expected in terms of deliverables for the course. It should clearly indicate the due dates for assignments and tests including grade weights. I experimented this semester to design it as a Gantt chart, which proved to be very effective.

Organize the information in clusters for easy and quick access. It is very useful, for instance, to open an "assignments" forum. It will contain all the information about assignments and also gives the opportunity to students to post their questions and comments about the assignments. In addition to that, the instructor can post the answers publicly for everyone to read. This reduces the number of messages about the same issue.
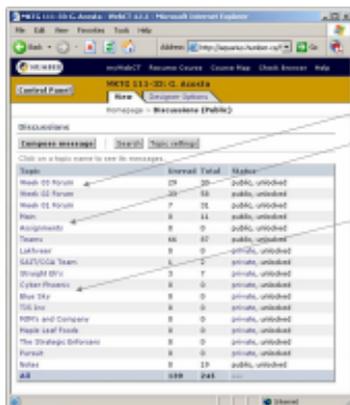
Good organization and structure:
- Open weekly forums
- Organize information in clusters for easy and quick access
- Create private forums for team's discussions

Create weekly forums. This has several advantages. On one hand it gives the instructor the opportunity to post a "welcome" message with a summary of the expectations for the week; on the other hand it concentrates the postings about a particular topic in a single place, making it easier for the students and the instructor to locate information.

Remind, remind, and remind in order to keep them focused. Use the front page of your course to post reminders about key activities (tests or assignments) for that particular week. Posting frequent announcements gives your site a lively feel and creates that urge for the students to check frequently to avoid missing any of the action. If you are using materials such as downloadable PowerPoint presentations, including a "what's next" slide as closing, to remind about upcoming deadlines, is also advisable. I know that it may sound like a lot; however in my experience, all these actions combined have proven to be very effective in addressing the concern of students' "lack of self-discipline."

5. Incorporate "take-aways" from other successful online customer experiences:

Relevant content and attractive visuals are key features to keep the interest levels high. Another characteristic of this generation is that they are very visual and have grown up in an environment where information is collected from very sophisticated interfaces. Therefore, lifeless "Times Roman" font over a white background is just plain boring and dull and won't do anything for them. Look around and count the number of young people who have MP3 players, cell phones with picture and video capabilities, laptops with wireless technology, PDAs with colour screens, you name it. It is frightening to think that you have to compete with all that to grab their attention. My message here is simple: make it look "cool" and interactive!
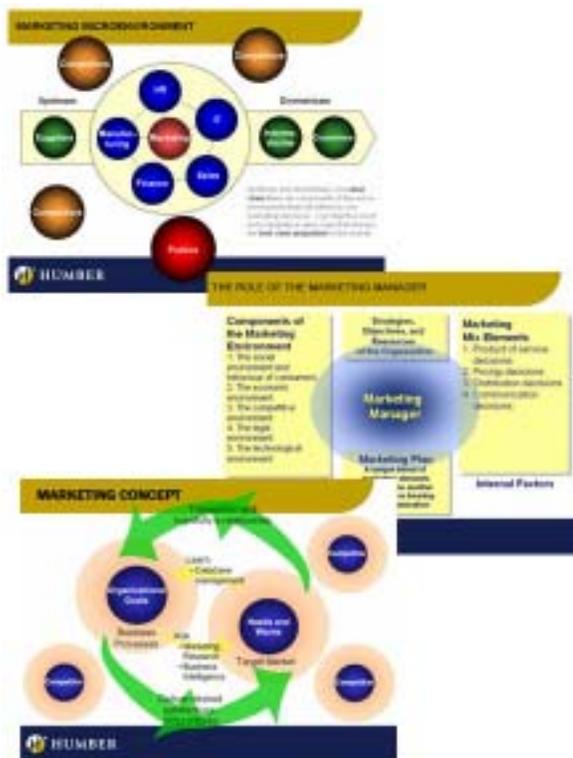
You may be thinking by now that this is a lot of work. You are right! However, it is also a lot of fun and a very rewarding experience. I thoroughly enjoy teaching online. All my courses are either online or "hybrid", meaning that my in-classroom courses have a support web site. I consider that this is the way of the future and that students will demand more and more online components in all their courses. It is a trend that is growing rapidly. Be prepared to meet the challenge! ◆

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About Humber

Humber College in Toronto Canada (www.humber.ca), has been an active participant and valuable contributor of the Learning College Project since year 2000. It is proud to be the only Canadian Community College selected as part of the group of 12 Vanguard Colleges leading this initiative.

Humber College is committed to the development of a stimulating learning environment that strongly engages students and effectively enables the learning process. Online learning is one of the areas in which the college has focused its efforts and resources to support the development of innovative learning formats that address the ever-evolving needs of society and businesses.

The Open Learning Centre at Humber College offers over 175 courses online, serving approximately 2,000 registrants each semester, backed-up by a solid IT infrastructure, a strong support staff, and a team of highly-skilled professors developing and implementing cutting-edge online teaching techniques.

The First-Year Experience: Supporting Student Learning, Student Development and Student Success

by Tina Stovall and Joann Wright

Most students who leave college before graduation do so because they do not become adequately integrated into the college environment and engaged in learning. They leave during their first semester or first year – without even giving themselves a chance to succeed (Tinto, 1996). Community college students often face special challenges in becoming integrated into the college environment because of their wide diversity with respect to age, personal/social background, academic ability, and career aspiration (Astin, 1993). Understanding that helping students achieve learning and success during their early college enrollment improves their chances for success all along the way, Moraine Valley Community College implemented a comprehensive first-year student support program, the First-Year Experience.

Program Overview

The First-Year Experience (FYE) is designed to help students make a successful transition to the college environment and to help them develop the skills and strategies needed for college learning. The FYE includes four specific intentional and intrusive support components: 1) placement testing and enrollment in appropriate courses including developmental education, 2) student orientation and registration, 3) COL-101 student success course and 4) completion of an individualized Master Academic Plan. All first-time, full-time students are required to participate in all four components.

Placement testing, part one, begins by ensuring that students begin college classes at a level where they can be successful. All applicants who indicate intention of attending the college full-time are required to complete an assessment of reading, writing and math skills. COMPASS, the computerized placement test, is offered on a walk-in basis throughout the year with extended hours during registration periods. Students with sufficient ACT test scores or previous college credit may choose to use them as formal determination of proficiency levels in place of COMPASS. Students

register for classes, including any needed developmental education classes, according to their placement test results.

Following completion of basic assessment, students are required to attend the half-day small group **Student Orientation and Registration (SOAR)**, part two. SOAR, taught by a team of counselors and academic advisors, focuses on preparing students for their first semester of college. SOAR includes informational sessions and small group discussions introducing the academic and

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Four Components of the First Year Experience

1. All applicants with the intention to attend college as full time students except those with sufficient ACT scores or previous college-level credit take the online COMPASS placement test to determine the level of course that will enable their initial success in college.

2. Students are required to attend a half-day orientation and registration session (SOAR) comprised of informational sessions and small group discussions that cover a variety of topics that introduce them to both academic and social aspects of attending college. SOAR topics are available on the college's website for review throughout the semester.

3. A student success course, COL-101, further facilitates students' success through small group sessions about college resources and individual learning styles, among other topics. Faculty are selected from all disciplines and must attend a training session prior to teaching the one credit-hour course.

4. All students enrolled in COL-101 complete a Master Academic Plan (MAP) developed with the help of college advisors. The plan encompasses the required academic courses necessary for their chosen major and career along with completing registration for their second semester.

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social environments of higher education, educational planning processes, review of placement test scores, introduction to the online SOAR web site including online registration tools, and individual assistance with course selection and registration. Students participating in SOAR complete an online inventory that assesses what they have learned through the SOAR process. As part of the inventory, students have the opportunity to review any of the SOAR topics about which they remain uncertain. Students are encouraged to return to the SOAR web site for additional information regarding policies, procedures and academic programs throughout their enrollment at the college.

Part three, the centerpiece of the four-part First-Year Experience, is a one semester-hour student success course, **COL-101, College: Changes, Challenges, Choices**. A campus-wide task force involving faculty and administrators developed the COL-101 curriculum and continues its involvement to insure the ongoing success of the course. COL-101 is designed to enhance student development and student learning and to improve student retention and academic success. The course, with a maximum enrollment of 22 students in each section, focuses on the issues that individuals face as new college students and provides ongoing peer and instructor support during the critical first semester of college.

Through self-exploration and group interaction, the course facilitates students' academic and social integration into the college environment and helps students build the skills necessary for success. For example, students assess their own learning styles and identify strategies to utilize their unique skills according to different types of teaching styles. The course introduces college resources available to assist students throughout their enrollment. For example, college librarians teach one session of each section of COL-101 in which they focus on information literacy and assist students in accessing and evaluating resources available in print and online. In addition, the counseling faculty provide a comprehensive curriculum of workshops and seminars that expand on the topics introduced in the COL-101 course. To enhance the COL-101 unit on diversity, staff in Multicultural Student Affairs welcome new student participation in the many multicultural awareness events they sponsor each semester. COL-101 not only helps students learn skills needed for success in college but also helps them apply these skills in their lives beyond college.

Faculty and administrators across the college teach COL-101. All instructors are required to have earned a master's degree. Prior to teaching the course for the first time, each instructor must complete a five-hour training session led by the Assistant Dean, New Student Retention with support from the counseling faculty and other members of the COL-101 task force. The training is offered several times each semester. Additional "faculty forums" are hosted throughout the year to provide an opportunity for new and experienced COL-101 instructors to share their experiences and expand their skills for assisting first-semester students.

Part four of the FYE, seamlessly integrated into the COL-101 course, involves each student's development of an individualized **Master Academic Plan (MAP)**. To develop MAPs, all COL-101 students participate in educational planning sessions taught by academic advisors. In these sessions, students learn about resources available and are provided assistance in determining educational requirements for their intended college major and career. Each student must submit a completed MAP as part of the COL-101 requirements. Students also learn about registration for the second semester as part of COL-101.

Implementation

The First-Year Experience was fully implemented for the first time in Fall 2000. Development of the different components of the First-Year Experience occurred over several years and included numerous faculty, administrators, and staff across campus. Components that had previously existed (placement testing, new student orientation) were revised and updated, and new components (COL-101, Master Academic Plan) were added following several years of pilot testing and review. All components were designed to create a comprehensive, integrated experience for students.

The college created a new position of Assistant Dean, New Student Retention, to direct implementation of the program. The Assistant Dean is officially a member of the Student Development administration; however, she works closely with her peers in the division of Academic Affairs as she directs the coordination of all departments, faculty, and staff involved in the First-Year Experience.

Since its initial implementation, the First-Year Experience has undergone continuous review and improvement. The training program for faculty has been expanded to include the ongoing "faculty forums" and more recently a mentoring program for new COL-101 instructors to receive ongoing support and guidance from more experienced instructors. A student needs assessment component has been piloted through use of the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory. As of Fall 2004, all of the educational planning sessions taught by academic advisors are conducted in computer labs so that students can take full advantage of the many online resources that have been built into the program.

The First-Year Experience is an excellent example of a college-wide collaborative effort that has improved and expanded the college's learning-centered environment. The program enhances the learning of students, faculty, and staff across the college community. Through their participation in FYE, students develop a better understanding of their responsibilities for learning and develop critical skills to become more self-directed learners. COL-101 provides opportunities for students to develop collaborative, supportive learning relationships with both students and instructors. Through FYE, faculty and staff have a unique opportunity to learn about students and foster supportive relationships outside of their traditional disciplines of instruction or administrative roles.

Assessment/Outcomes

During the first five years of implementation, approximately 15,000 students have participated in the First-Year Experience. Over 500 faculty and administrators have participated in the required instructor training session. To accommodate increased student enrollments, the number of COL-101 sections offered each semester has continued to increase. During Fall 2005, there are 150 sections of the course being taught, with approximately 3,000 students enrolled.

The Office of Institutional Research has conducted follow-up research on each cohort of new full-time students since Fall 2000. This research consistently shows that students who successfully complete COL-101 during their first semester perform better than their peers who do not enroll in COL-101 or who enroll but do not successfully complete the course. Specifically, the research shows, at a statistically significant level, that COL-101 completers earned higher first semester grade point averages than those who did not enroll and those who did not successfully complete the course. COL-101 completers also earned higher cumulative grade point averages at the end of their first year than those who did not enroll and those who did not successfully complete the course. Successful COL-101 students completed a higher percentage of their first semester credit hours. Successful COL-101 students were also more likely to continue their enrollment to the second semester and second year. Comparisons of these groups of students can be seen in the figures below.

Persistence of Three Student Groups
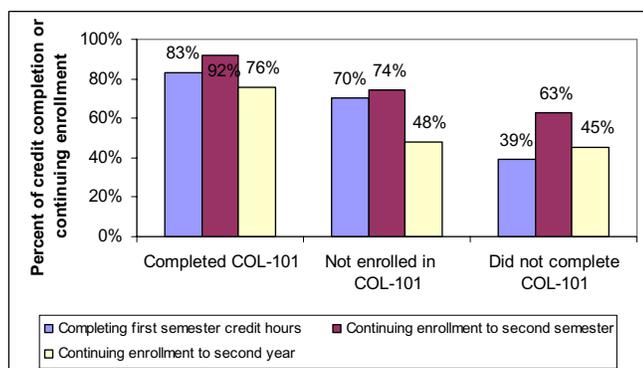
GPA of Three Student Groups
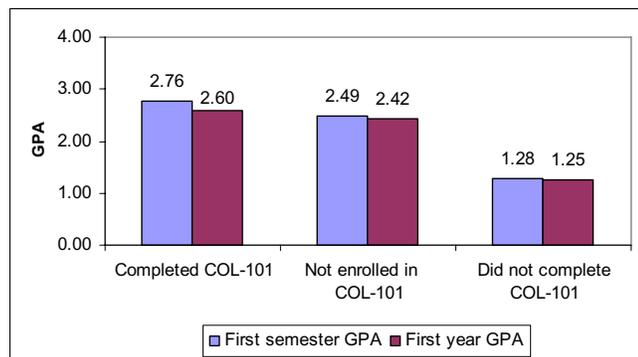
Students complete evaluations of their experiences at the end of different components of the program. Specifically, evaluations are collected at the end of the Student Orientation and Registration (SOAR) program and at the end of the COL-101 course. The evaluations allow students to report their level of satisfaction with FYE and to indicate what they have learned along the way. During Fall 2005, a pilot program in assessing specific learning outcomes of COL-101 is being implemented in all sections of the course. Through FYE, the college is able to continuously assess student needs and revise our programs to ensure their intended positive impact on student learning, student development, and student success.

Awards

In addition to the success of the students, the Moraine Valley First-Year Experience has received several local and national awards. They include:

- 2004 Teaching and Learning Excellence Award, Illinois Community College Board
- 2003 First Place Terry O'Banion Shared Journey Award, National Council on Student Development and League for Innovation in the Community College
- 2003 Best Practice Award, National Council on Student Development
- 2003 Exemplary Program Award, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
- 2003 Innovation of the Year Award, Moraine Valley Community College

For more information about the First-Year Experience at Moraine Valley Community College, contact Joann Wright, Assistant Dean for New Student Retention, at *wright@morainevalley.edu*. ◆

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Tina Stovall serves as Dean for Counseling, Advising and Multicultural Student Affairs at Moraine Valley Community College, one of the 12 Vanguard Learning Colleges, located in Palos Hills, IL. She is a 1999 graduate of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where her dissertation research focused on the relationships between participation in a community college student success course and academic performance and persistence. She can be reached at stovall@morainevalley.edu. *Beginning January 2006, Dr. Stovall will be serving as Vice President for Student Services at Lake Land College in Mattoon, IL.*

Joann Wright is the Assistant Dean of New Student Retention at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, IL. She is pursing a doctoral degree in Executive Community College Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Exemplary Professors: Factors Leading to the Development of Award-Winning Teachers

by Jacob Silvestri

A college ceases to be great if its faculty is not. With rising costs of tuition and increasing instructor accountability related to student learning outcomes, effective college teaching is now at the forefront for individual professors, administrators, and entire campuses at large (Seldin, 1999). Although the concept of improving college teaching is hardly a new idea, the interest in improving instruction in colleges and universities has mushroomed in recent years, burrowing into all areas of the country and all types of academic institutions (Feldman, 1997). Today, higher education, in an attempt to better meet the various learning needs of the diverse students it serves, is moving away from "lip-service" endorsements of the importance of effective instruction and student learning to concerted and sustained efforts to improve college teaching.

As the nation's premier teaching institution, community colleges are beginning to embrace the Learning College movement, taking a broader approach toward teaching and learning that requires the entire college to function as one to more effectively achieve the organization's goals. With higher education's increasing need to develop and promote teaching and learning and assist colleges in adapting to students' changing needs, this research aims to gain perspective on teacher development based on award-winning professors' classroom experiences. The purpose of this research was to explore community college professors' development into highly effective teachers.

Research Methodology

The research participants were current Hudson Valley Community College full-time faculty members who received the State University of New York's (SUNY) prestigious Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. No higher honor can be awarded to a faculty member within the SUNY system. Eligibility for this award includes status as a current, tenured full-time faculty member within the SUNY system with at least three years' teaching experience. The primary criterion for the Chancellor's Award is skill in teaching, although consideration is given to sound scholarship and service to the University and campus.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with award-winning professors provided an understanding of the intersection of the importance of effective teaching with the creation of a learning college environment. Interview questions were developed by the researcher, based on a review of the literature. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, followed by a narrative analysis in which the data were sorted by general statements, common themes, and existing relationships across the participants' responses.

The researcher contacted 30 award-winning professors, of which 22 (73%) participated. Of the 22 participants, 14 (64%) were male and eight (36%) were female. The majority of participants (91%) were Caucasian, only 9% were minorities. Faculty members in the following academic departments took part: Mathematics, Physical Education, English, Criminal Justice, Fine Arts, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Teacher Preparation, and Early Childhood. The intentional inclusion of a diversity of academic subject matter was designed to determine common characteristics that spanned academic disciplines and associated teaching strategies.

Analysis of the interviews revealed 10 key factors in the participants' process of becoming exemplary teachers. Through both active and introspective processes, participants expressed two factors that were most important in exemplary teaching: love for teaching and learning and respect for students. An additional eight factors emerged as important in developing teaching excellence.

Key Factors Leading to Exemplary Teaching.
Most important factors, as expressed by participants
1. Love for teaching and learning
2. Respect for students
Additional factors
3. Student-centered philosophy of teaching and learning
4. Motivation
5. Knowledge
6. Organization and preparation
7. Models and mentors
8. Other teaching experiences
9. Continuous improvement
10. Work ethic

Results

Factor 1: Love for Teaching and Learning

According to the award-winners, love for teaching and learning served as a foundation to develop competencies that lead to exemplary teaching. Participants passionately spoke about teaching and how satisfied they were with making teaching both their career and life's mission.

Demonstrating this love and passion for teaching and learning, one professor mentioned, "I love my job. There are weeks when

I forget to pick up my paycheck." Another participant who expressed his love for teaching echoed the same sentiment saying, "I feel like I am retired . . . because I define retirement by waking up and doing what [I] love to do." The same idea was reinforced by another award-winner who commented, "I am addicted to 'light bulb' moments, similar to how you first felt when you learned how to ride a bike or tie your own shoes. This is how I feel when I see my students get it. I am often wowed that I get paid to do this." Exemplary teachers love what they do and demonstrate tremendous enjoyment and fulfillment when discussing their roles as teachers.

Factor 2: Respect for Students

Similar to the award-winners' passion for teaching and learning, their respect for students also served as the second foundational aspect for exemplary teaching practices. As many of the professors mentioned, respect for students and desire to help others learn challenged them to be their very best. All 22 participants reflected the ultimate reason why they entered the profession: a desire to influence the life of a learner.

In addition to a respect for students, all participants also mentioned devotion toward the community college. Participants often stated that they chose to remain in the community college classroom primarily because of the diversity and uniqueness of this population versus that of a 4-year university. As described by one participant, "I believe I serve a greater purpose at the community college." Award-winners spoke passionately about serving this particular group of students, commenting on how their own students' accomplishments helped ignite their desire to become exemplary professors. One stated, "For many [students] we are the first teachers to actually give them a chance and not judge them based on their background. Teaching here is important work."

While expressing respect for students and the community college, award winners revealed that teaching is not about proving their own knowledge to students, but rather, teaching is about using their knowledge to facilitate student learning. Simply put, the participants emphasized they care about what they teach and wholeheartedly care about who they teach it to. The participants' devotion to the community college is an important theme because even though the majority had teaching experiences elsewhere, they stated that the community college held a special place in their hearts and that they preferred teaching community college students.

Factor 3: Student-Centered Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Eighteen participants (81%) mentioned the relationship between their educational philosophy of teaching and learning and their resultant effectiveness in the classroom. As one participant described, "My personal philosophy of education reinforces exemplary teaching; giving knowledge is sacred. The rewards go well beyond the money if you do it right. Teaching is a selfless journey." When discussing his philosophy and how it contributes toward exemplary development, another participant explained, "It took me

a while, but eventually I learned that teaching is not all about me. I am here to make a difference in the life of a student, however big or small that influence may be. This is my mission." The award-winning teachers in this study understood that their teaching is essential and that each student, regardless of background, possesses the ability to learn.

Factor 4: Motivation

Sixteen participants (73%) cited the importance of motivation as it pertains to the developmental process of effective teaching. Seven made a comment similar to, "Motivation is a two-way street for both my students and me." Participants stated that because many students who attend community colleges are under-prepared, or well-prepared but under-motivated, the teacher must assume some level of responsibility to inspire learner motivation and passion to learn. The concept of teacher motivation was evident in one participant's response, "If I am not motivated to do the best possible job I am capable of doing, how can I expect the same from my students?" Another participant clearly illustrated the reciprocal nature of motivation. He stated, "Wanting to be the best I could possibly be for my students and the personal satisfaction that comes along with witnessing my students learn offers me endless, intrinsic motivation." Award-winners stressed the importance of leading by example and seeking and accepting opportunities to challenge themselves in an effort to improve.

Factor 5: Knowledge and Passion for Subject Area

Exemplary teachers expressed the importance of possessing a breadth and depth of subject matter knowledge. The limitation of having only subject matter expertise was also discussed and summarized by one participant as, "In order to be exemplary you have to know what you are talking about, but at the same time you need to know how to present what you know and make sure all of your students get it. Know your subject, but at the same time do not forget why we are here, for the students." Eighteen participants (82%) explained that in teaching and demonstrating a passion for their subject area, they were able to engage students, thereby making a difference in their lives.

Factor 6: Organization and Preparation

Seventeen (78%) exemplary teachers reported they valued the importance of being organized, a characteristic often cited in the research as a keystone for effective teaching (Davis, 1993; McKeachie, 1999). Teachers identified their organizational habits were not only helpful in providing effective teaching, but also helped students learn and grasp concepts. As one professor described, "I can never be over-prepared or over-organized to enter any classroom." As described by another participant, "Exemplary teaching reminds me of the Boy Scouts' motto, 'be prepared'."

Factor 7: Role Models and Mentors

Twenty participants (91%) commented on the influence of others in their development as exemplary teachers. Role models and mentors consistently were cited as a critical component of their

decision to enter the college teaching profession. As explained by one award winner, "I was lured into college teaching by a mentor who saw what I did not see [in myself]."

Although award winners mostly mentioned positive influences, three participants talked openly about negative role models and their powerful influence in determining how not to teach. As described by one participant, "In law school, I had a very bad instructor. I vowed to myself that if I ever taught, I would be completely unlike him." Another award winner explained, "When I started teaching, I promised myself that I would never treat students as I had been treated." This process of reflection on personal educational experiences, both positive and negative, provides important lessons for exemplary professors to develop their own teaching styles.

Factor 8: Related Teaching Experiences

Award winners were asked to comment on the influence of previous teaching experiences and how meaningful they were to their process of development. Participants were asked if they had any experience teaching at other levels such as the elementary, middle, or high school levels, or at 4-year colleges. Thirteen of the participants (59%) had taught at an elementary school, middle school, high school, or 4-year college prior to teaching at the community college. Fifteen (68%) of the participants referenced their other teaching as "learning" experiences. As one participant explained, "I have taught at many different levels and different types of student. Each experience has contributed greatly towards my overall development and effectiveness in the classroom." The best teachers draw from different experiences. Whether positive or negative, each teaching experience creates opportunities to learn what works well and what does not, allowing teachers to adjust to a variety of situations and environments.

Factor 9: Continuous Improvement

Participants possessed a range of 10-36 years of teaching experience and reported increased confidence regarding their ability to effectively present their subject now compared to when they first entered the classroom. Yet, despite the impressive years of teaching experience, exemplary teachers continue to challenge themselves to try new things within the classroom. Throughout the interviews, six award-winners (27%) emphasized the importance of continuous improvement: that there is no point at which an exemplary teacher can afford to stop trying to improve. As one participant explained, "One who dares to teach must never cease to learn."

Factor 10: Work Ethic

It was apparent throughout the interviews that award-winning teachers embrace hard work and challenges. Many of the other factors mentioned inherently require work and determination, demonstrating the fact that the process of attaining an exemplary teaching status is never ending. Eleven participants (50%) specifically mentioned the advantage of having a strong work ethic, illustrating the fact that teacher effectiveness requires

focused effort over time. As one faculty member said, "Thinking of teaching reminds me of the Army's slogan; it is the toughest job you will ever love." Another noted, "Good teaching can be fun, passionate, and stimulating, but it is tough work if you do it right." When asked what their secret was, the common ingredients were 1) time dedicated toward teaching and learning, and 2) effort to make sure all students learn.

Final Thoughts

This research demonstrates that the developmental journey toward teaching excellence is an endeavor of the head, heart, and hands. The study provides an understanding of individual characteristics and developmental experiences of award-winning community college teachers. The researcher acknowledges that the findings here do not explain the entire picture of teaching excellence. Effective college teaching does not occur within a vacuum. As Garvin states, it takes a "community of commitment" across a campus to foster a culture of excellence in teaching and learning (Garvin, 1993, p.18). This systems orientation requires an entire institution to function as one to effectively achieve the goals of individual teachers in their quest for excellence and the goals of the organization to meet the needs of students. Further research should explore the application of these findings to larger populations of exemplary teachers.

> **"One who dares to teach must never cease to learn."**

This is an exciting time within higher education where the emphasis once placed on "providing instruction" is moving toward "producing learning", making the role of the teacher even more central within the overall mission of the institution. Angelo and Cross (1993, p. 3) echo this sentiment stating, "Teaching without learning is just talking." As the relationship between exemplary teachers and their students' learning is more clearly understood, the question for faculty and administrators to continue to explore is: "What more can we do to support teachers' professional development toward the ultimate goal of enhancing the learning environment for our students?" ◆

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Giving a Little TLC: Providing Insights to Technology and the Learning College

by Jeffrey Bathe

Compared with that of the past 100 years, the rate of change occurring in society is unprecedented as there have been unparalleled increases in new technology (Berge, 2000). Peter Drucker has proclaimed a major change in education in the next 50 years is due to the growth of technology (de los Santos, 2001). And "nothing in the history of humankind had permeated every aspect of life and culture as deeply and as rapidly as have the computer technology and the global network of the internet" (Nasseh, 2000, p. 217).

The learning college is a relatively new concept, but it is built on long-established values in the community college. We know that the learning college places a high level of importance on quality teaching for the intent of helping students make connections to their learning. "If the concept of the learning college cannot come to full fruition in the community college, the community college we know today may cease to exist, and the community college we dream of for the future may never come to be" (O'Banion, 1997a, xvi).

Community college administrators are taking notice of the importance of these important concepts. Community college presidents realize the role distance education and technology are playing in today's community college. In a study conducted by Milliron and Miles, almost all of the presidents (96%) surveyed believed that the trend toward information technology will continue. In addition, 95% thought training faculty to use information technology will be an essential part of staff development, and 87% thought the cost of obtaining and maintaining technology will be key with governing boards (Milliron & Miles, 2000). The continued leadership of the League for Innovation in the Community College, through the Learning College Summit, Leadership Abstracts, and the vanguard institutions shows that the learning college principles are alive and well in the community colleges. This vitality is further supported by the growth of institutions using the CCSSE to examine student engagement.

Bringing the Principles Together

The learning college is based on six key principles (O'Banion, 1997b):

- The learning college creates substantive change in individual learners.

- The learning college engages learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their own choices.

- The learning college creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.

- The learning college assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities.

- The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners.

- The learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners.

All of these principles can be impacted by the use of technology. For example, when looking at the substantive change we see that "technology is being used in many new and exciting ways to enhance student learning" (Boggs, 2000, p. 47). In recent years computers have become an indispensable item in our daily lives, and educational institutions are actively utilizing the Internet as a method to reach learners. Lim (2000) predicts the Internet will be the most popular delivery method of distance education in the future. The learning college principle of creating and offering many options for learning as possible is demonstrated by the continued growth of online and hybrid instruction in Illinois. The Illinois Virtual Campus (2005) reported that Illinois colleges and universities had 93,715 online enrollments during the Spring/Winter 2005 term. This is an increase of 24,683 enrollments (36%) from the 69,032 enrollments reported for the Spring/Winter 2004 term. Furthermore, the concepts of the learning college and instructional technology can be tied together by the words of Terry O'Banion, who said, "The learning college places learning first and provides educational experiences for learners anyway, anyplace, anytime" (O'Banion, 1996).

What is Being Done?

Moraine Valley Community College. MVCC provided learning challenge grants to assist faculty to enhance student learning through the use of technology and interactive experiences. These opportunities lead to the development of a virtual college, showcasing the institutions online class delivery. These grants also helped lead to the development of essential support services in a virtual format that included advisement and registration, textbook purchases, library resources, and tutoring. With the development of the Online Student Orientation and Registration web site, students have access to a self-paced, interactive, Internet-based module that supports learning about college programs, services, and registration processes.

Cascadia Community College. At CCC an ePortfolio system was implemented to provide a systematic and organized collection of student work documenting a student's efforts, progress

or achievement of an intended outcome. The ePortfolios serve as a form of assessment that seeks to measure a student's skills or knowledge in a subject area. The ePortfolio allows students to document personal educational development and learn and practice technical skills.

CCC students are first introduced to the ePortfolio in one of three classes (College Strategies, Study Strategies, or Careers in Information Technology) during their first year. During this term students begin to create their ePortfolio and then are expected to add artifacts to their ePortfolio throughout their time at Cascadia.

Illinois Community College Online. Grant opportunities allowed for Elgin Community College**,** Illinois Central College, Kankakee Community College, and Southwestern Illinois College to collaborate on the development of online resources to support hybrid instruction of medical laboratory technician (MLT) courses. Each institution developed specific content pieces and shared them with the partner institutions. As a follow up to the grant, Kankakee Community College proceeded to complete the development of materials and courses to facilitate their offering all of the program coursework in an online format. Students from outside the district can participate in the program, completing coursework online and performing their laboratory work at their local hospitals. This was made possible due to the MLT director establishing partnerships with these facilities.

The Community College of Baltimore County. CCBC determined that their faculty should be trained about the pedagogy of online teaching. To address this need they created the Virtual Academy, which is an intensive training program with outcomes tied to the creation of an online course. The academy has evolved since its development to include delivery in different formats including hybrid and online versions. During the course the faculty becomes proficient in the pedagogy of online learning and demonstrate the best practices of online instruction. They also assess their personal learning and teaching styles and evaluate the traditional course in light of that assessment.

Moving Forward: Questions to Ask

When looking at what needs to be done to move forward with technology and learning college principles, there are a series of questions that need to be asked:

1. How does your college train faculty and staff to make the best use of technology?

2. How are colleges helping students develop the capacity to learn in multiple formats?

3. How is your college using technology to promote help students be prepared for the real world?

Training faculty and staff. As institutions, we need to make sure that we provide more than instruction on using a tool, but to use the tool effectively. Providing instruction or grouping faculty into

interdisciplinary groups to encourage natural faculty dialog about a specific tool/approach are a beginning.

Methods used by colleges to address training include:

• Making technology use an element of the tenure granting process

• Providing grants or release time to learn new tools

• Providing training programs that encompass short term immediate training or longer academies

• Creating a special computer lab or multimedia center for faculty, staffed with specialists in software and/or instructional design

• Linking faculty together for peer-to-peer assistance

Helping students in multiple formats. At community colleges there is not a prototypical student. Because our students come with a wide range of experiences, institutions need to examine methods for how to present information to students in different formats including online. A few approaches include:

• Hybrid courses – models the real world for students, helps faculty move forward slowly.

• Put computer skills into non-computer classes – competency embedded in learning.

• Students influence faculty by demanding what they get in other classes (e.g. on-line components).

• The benefits of the technology may be intangible as well as showing up in measured outcomes. Also look for long-term lifetime learning kind of use.

• In KCC's college success course they are presented with information about e-mail, the learning resource center and can have the course delivered in an online or hybrid model.

Technology and the real world. Just about everyone agrees that computer literacy is now a foundational skill with reading, writing and math. However, while computer literacy is important, an even more important area is information literacy. With this we are referring to how to seek, find, evaluate and use information effectively. To address these needs many schools are creating courses to address these needs. At KCC, there is a two-credit hour course on library and information literacy in addition to an component that is part of the college's college success skills course, which is recommended to all first-time full-time students.

Things to Remember

McClenney (n.d.) discussed some of the lessons that were learned during the initial learning college project. Some of these insights need to be kept in mind as the efforts to infuse technology and the learning college principles into the institution. She points out that the journey is long, that there will be multiple tasks, and there will be challenges that are conceptually and

politically complex. This is especially true as institutions are faced with budget shortfalls and funding cuts from state and federal agencies. Creativity (e.g., grants and outside partnerships) and planning (e.g., technology plans) are essential to being able to be able to balance the technology and fiscal needs of the institution.

She points out that innovations and projects abound, but they sometimes lack unifying goals or principles. The work to expand technology across the curriculum and the institution needs to have representation at all levels of the institution. The college needs to identify, within its yearly priorities, accrediting projects or technology plans and make sure that there are not conflicting efforts underway. Some of the Vanguard Learning Colleges are attempting to create a common set of principles, goals, and values focused on learning to help collect, unify, and focus college initiatives.

Finally, McClenney says that the "commitment to become a Learning College can best be viewed as a long, arduous, and exciting journey to realign institutional priorities, policies, programs, practices, and personnel to focus on learning as the primary business of the college."

We see that technology should be one of our foci on learning. Administrators should strive to help students integrate technology into their learning. By doing this we will not only improve our students and our institutions, but also our future.◆

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Early Start on College Possible in 50 States, But Results Unclear

Reprinted with permission from *Inside Illinois*, December 1, 2005, Vol. 25, No. 11.

by Craig Chamberlain

College is becoming a requirement for more and more jobs.

But are the programs in place to motivate and move more kids from high school to higher education? Are those programs serving the students who need them? Are the programs getting the needed oversight?

A recent study of all 50 states contains both good news and cause for concern, according to Debra Bragg, a professor of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the study's principal investigator.

She'll be presenting key findings from the study, known as APASS (Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success), on Nov. 19 in a presidential session at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, in Philadelphia.

The complete findings, including state-by-state profiles, also are posted on the APASS Web site, *www.apass.uiuc.edu*.

One big surprise in the study's results: All 50 states said they support dual-credit or dual-enrollment, giving high school students the opportunity to do college-level course work for college credit.

A decade ago, these programs – most often set up between high schools and community colleges – were few and far between, Bragg said. Only a few years ago, experts speculated that only a handful of states supported them through either legislation or state agency guidelines.

Now dual-credit and dual-enrollment are "spreading like wildfire nationally," Bragg found. Her research corroborates a recent U.S. Department of Education study finding that 71 percent of U.S. public high schools offer dual-credit courses, and 98 percent of public two-year colleges enroll high school students in college courses.

Dual-credit or dual-enrollment was at the center of most high school-to-college transition initiatives, she said.

But the study also found little evidence from the states regarding which students were being served, or how well. "There are very few well-done studies that tell us whether students taking these credits are better prepared for college, or whether they're completing college," she said.

The APASS project looked chiefly at nine models, or "academic pathways," being used to aid the transition from high school to college: Advanced Placement; bridge programs; the College Level Examination Program; dual credit and dual enrollment; GED (general equivalency diploma) programs that bridge to college; International Baccalaureate; middle and early college high schools; Tech Prep; and virtual high schools and colleges.

The researchers sought to determine how, and to what extent, these various approaches were being implemented by both state and local education agencies, Bragg said. They also wanted to know how extensively states and agencies, in the use of each approach, made "special efforts" to serve populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Advanced Placement (AP) courses, for instance, are widespread among wealthier urban and suburban schools, Bragg said. But despite efforts to make those courses more available in poorer and rural schools, "they're not going to reach the masses of kids who are in high school and who still need to go to college," she said.

The research, conducted between January 2004 and August 2005, involved the collection of extensive documentation from each state, as well as interviews with state-level K-12 and higher education officials, and site visits to seven states. The goal was to get an overview of the current situation, Bragg said. She hopes this will be only the first phase in an ongoing project.

A principal question in any further research will be whether the various pathways are aiding underserved students, or primarily academic high-achievers and students who already have opportunities to access college, Bragg said.

"These models and these strategies are so new that people haven't really thought about it on that level, or documented who they really intend to serve. What we're trying to figure out is who will really be able to benefit from these models and who will be left behind," she said.

In looking at the different models or pathways, Bragg said that each appears to reach out to different student groups. "Even though it's rather haphazard, it does seem like there's almost an unspoken strategy behind them," she said.

Tech Prep, for instance, tends to target students in the middle of the academic pack, many from working-class families, who traditionally have been steered toward vocational programs. Middle and early college high schools tend to target minority and at-risk students.

"What we think is most interesting is that the states that are moving ahead with a plan for how to encourage more high school students to go to college are beginning to see these various models as a portfolio for the state," Bragg said. "They have a little AP here, and some middle college high schools over there. They are beginning to build this portfolio of strategies that might collectively help lots of kids move onto college."

In other states, that kind of strategic thinking is "completely off their radar screen," she said.

Oversight also is a concern, Bragg said, and it "varies greatly" from state to state. "There are real quality control issues here. Most states have very minimal quality control over this kind of thing," she said. "If you're a collegiate institution, one of the great fears with dual-credit is that we will essentially diminish the integrity of the college curriculum if we are not paying attention to the quality of these courses."

The APASS project was funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education and is part of ongoing research by the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at Illinois. Bragg is the director of the office.

The co-principal investigator on the study was Stanley Ikenberry, Regent Professor of Educational Organization and Leadership at Illinois. He is a former president of the American Council on Education and is a president emeritus of the University of Illinois.◆

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The Case for Learning Communities

Reprinted with permission from *Community College Journal,* August/September 2005, Vol. 76, Issue 1.

by Maria Hesse and Marybeth Mason

Many distinguished leaders and innovators in higher education who are calling for curricular reform in order to increase student engagement and retention cite learning communities as a powerful model for change. In this article, the term "learning communities" refers to "the purposeful restructuring of the curriculum by linking or clustering courses that enroll a common cohort of students. This represents an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community and foster more explicit connections among students, faculty and disciplines" (Gabelnick et al., 1990).

Rationale for Learning Communities

At the 1998 National Conference on Higher Education in her speech, "What Do We Know about Students' Learning and How Do We Know It," Patricia Cross spoke about the shifts that have taken place in our understanding of how students learn. Cross noted that many researchers believe that "knowledge is constructed by humans through social interaction. Education, therefore, should be based in learning communities where teachers and students act interdependently to construct meaning and understanding" (Cross, 1998). The best learning communities are classrooms where students are connected through meaningful conversations in cooperative groups with each other and with teachers.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities' 2002 report, "Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College," calls on the academic community to provide opportunities for students to use their "intellectual skills within rich disciplinary and multidisciplinary contexts" (2002). The report identifies integrated and linked learning communities, diverse forms of experiential learning, and collaborative research projects as powerful and effective strategies for deepening student preparation for a knowledge-intensive society and increasing the ability to persist and succeed at higher levels of achievement.

In an American Association of Community College's issue paper, "Fulfilling the Promise of Access and Opportunity: Collaborative Community Colleges for the 21st Century," Laura Rendon notes the need for community colleges to become more collaborative and responsive to students who have not traditionally had college opportunities. Rendon recommends that "community colleges should design validating teaching and learning environments that are relationship-centered, connecting faculty and students" (Rendon, 2002). She goes on to describe learning communities as an example of validating, democratic classrooms in action. Learning environments such as these can "transform nontraditional students into powerful learners and persisters" (Rendon, 2002).

Benefits for Students

In *Honored But Invisible,* W. Norton Grubb and colleagues note, "One common benefit of LC's [learning communities] is that they create communities among students. Students report that they come to know their fellow students better and are able to work with them more both in and out of class—in contrast to conventional practice in community colleges, where students typically find a new group in virtually every class they take" (Grubb, 1999). Students care about making friends and feeling connected to the college. Helping to create quality relationships is particularly challenging at commuter campuses, and the large majority of community colleges are commuter campuses.

Learning communities are built on the premise that learning is a social endeavor and that quality learning is enhanced by quality relationships. One learning community at Chandler-Gilbert Community College in Arizona combined first-year composition, film and literature, and computer information systems courses under the theme, "Creating Community in a Changing World." Student Bob Karp explained the impact the experience had on him, "The learning community was like an extended family, and the friends that I made here became the most important reason for me to

come to class and to continue with my college education" (Hesse and Mason, 2003).

Students benefit when faculty intentionally structure classwork and assignments whereby students actively work together rather than independently. "Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding" (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Learning communities create learning environments where students are not expected to be passive listeners, taking notes and memorizing facts, but instead are expected to work together, reading, writing, talking, and relating their learning to their daily lives.

One of the curricular benefits is that students are provided with opportunities to see differing perspectives on topics, readings, or issues. Learning communities operate around a theme or particular topic which is explored from several different angles. Team-taught courses can provide students with other benefits as well. Students are likely to see connections between various disciplines and thus are provided with a more realistic view of problem-solving. In team-taught learning communities "faculty from several different disciplines are in the room, providing different perspectives, so students get a real range of response from the different discipline areas" (Grubb, 1999).

Learning communities also offer more coherent curricular opportunities. In addressing general education curriculum, skill classes can combine with "content" classes for a meaningful context. There is an opportunity for teaching critical reading, analytical writing, persuasive speaking, and computer literacy in the context of a discipline. For example, at Paradise Valley Community College in Arizona, "The Literate Scientist" combines organic chemistry and technical writing with an emphasis on using library resources for the science major. Collin County Community College in Texas offers several learning communities as part of its civic engagement initiative, one of which pairs history with English under the theme "Rhetoric and the Republic."

Learning communities offer special opportunities for studies in a professional or major track to be offered in concert with other portions of the curriculum. Lane Community College in Oregon offers learning communities for both health occupations and culinary arts. "Bio-Bonds: Blocks for Your Body" combines chemistry and cell biology, while "Food for Thought" links culinary arts, basic math applications, and English as away to examine the influential role of food. Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois, offers a team-taught "Forensic Science" learning community pairing chemistry and criminal justice courses.

A thematic approach that asks students to work toward answering a larger question or solving a problem allows faculty to move away from a more simplistic "skill and drill" approach where the emphasis is on covering the textbook. The use of themes can make courses more enticing to students and thus help them become more motivated to pursue and complete the courses. At

Skagit Valley Community College in Washington one learning community that paired a sociology course with a nutrition course was called "Culture, Poverty and Diet." At LaGuardia Community College in New York, the "Moral Thinking" cluster students focus on ethical dilemmas raised by the World Trade Center disaster in their English, philosophy, and film courses. Students in these learning communities have more time on task to explore, read, and write about socially relevant topics.

In addition to interesting themes, sometimes learning communities are offered in "block" scheduling whereby courses are offered back-to-back ensuring students an attractive class schedule. Students have the perception that their time is well spent taking one learning community rather than taking two or three separate courses. By having various assignments relate to the same theme, students have a sense that they are using their time more efficiently and that the curriculum is more integrated and less disjointed.

Block scheduling is an attractive alternative as it allows time for different types of activities such as field trips, labs, and special events. Discussions and activities that often seem rushed in a 50-minute or one-hour class can be extended for longer periods of time to encourage deeper thinking and more thoughtful analysis of issues. And when faculty spend more time with their students, they gain a deeper understanding of their goals, their learning styles, and their needs.

Learning communities promote student interaction with their instructors. Pat Cross notes that "when faculty show an interest in students, get to know them through informal as well as formal channels, engage in conversations with them, show interest in their intellectual development, then students respond with enthusiasm and engagement" (Cross, 1998). In "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," the authors explain, "Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to thinking about their own values and future plans" (Chickering and Gamson, 1987).

Community colleges across the nation are becoming more diverse, and learning communities are addressing diversity issues on several fronts. First, they are attempting to increase the success rate for under-represented students. Second, they are addressing special populations of at-risk students whose ranks often comprise primarily under-represented students. Third, learning communities are providing an avenue for students to work with people different from themselves across lines of culture, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and other differences.

While many colleges have students attending for varied reasons and representing different generations and ethnic groups, most do not do enough to help students learn how to work well within an increasingly diverse campus population. In 2001, *Time* magazine hailed Seattle Central Community College for helping diverse students learn to work together in small teams (Goldstein,

2001). One of the college's thematically linked learning communities is called "Our Ways of Knowing: The African-American Experience and Social Change," which combines sociology, political science, art, and English courses. Activities include small group and whole class discussions, seminars, group projects, field trips, guest speakers, and film analysis.

Learning communities are often developed to address the special needs of particular groups of students. California's DeAnza College has designed several learning communities to serve under-prepared and under-represented students. For example, their "Summer Express" program combines pre-college reading and writing with a college orientation course and is offered over the summer to prepare students for successful entry into college in the fall.

At Jackson Community College in Michigan, learning communities were developed to address the needs of at-risk students and they had impressive results for the students and for the college. The "retention rate for all students enrolled in learning communities topped 93 percent—30 percent higher than our regular rate. Of the at-risk students enrolled in learning communities, 92 percent of them re-enrolled in the winter semester. Furthermore, on a four-point scale, the at-risk students enrolled in learning communities had a four-point average of 2.41 compared with a GPA of 1.68 for other at-risk students at me college. They completed 92 percent of the classes they enrolled in. And at the end of the first semester, 30 percent were on academic probation compared with 41 percent for other at-risk students" (Howser, 1998).

Multiple studies document increased student retention and persistence, as well as increased student learning and achievement. "Long-term studies at various community colleges, including Community College of Denver, North Seattle Community College, and the QUANTA program at Daytona Beach Community College in Florida, suggest that students in learning communities have significantly higher retention, persistence, and graduation rates than students in traditional courses. Other studies have also demonstrated significant gains in persistence for learning community students (Tinto et al., 1994) as well as higher leve1of academic achievement than students in stand-alone courses (Tokuno, 1993)" (Fogarty & Dunlap, 2003).

Benefits to Faculty

Innovative faculty further develop their teaching methodologies in learning communities that invite an array of pedagogical approaches, such as cooperative and collaborative learning, service learning, experiential learning, problem-based learning, writing and speaking across the curriculum, and innovative uses of technology.

Learning communities can also provide opportunities for increased faculty interaction with peers and ongoing faculty development. In explaining why his learning community experience had been so meaningful, one instructor states, "It's very, very enriching to see other teachers work, teachers who are already quite adept, quite experienced, veteran teachers with enormous reserves of technique. … So there's an enormous kind of fertilization, different sorts of ideas, and also you get a chance to run things up the flagpole, and so there's that kind of enrichment that would never be possible in the normal traditional venue where you are going into the classroom every day by yourself" (Grubb, 1999).

In addition to creating a community for student learners, one of the benefits of participating in a learning community is that faculty often feel a renewed sense of collegiality and community. Jean MacGregor, co-director of the National Learning Communities Project, explains, "As they look back on their learning community teaching experiences, the faculty teams who feel the most engaged speak repeatedly about their own learning and their own sense of community, beyond what they created for and with their students. They speak of the intense stimulation of discovering each others' disciplines and teaching practices, the affirmation of reflecting together on students they had in common, and the deep satisfaction of learning to collaboratively create a curriculum. They reflect on a newfound trust and respect for their colleagues" (MacGregor, 2000).

In addition, learning communities help to make the content that faculty love more interesting and relevant to students, while helping faculty to expand their understandings of other disciplines and interdisciplinary work.

Faculty are also attracted to programs where they see their students succeeding. Student success, as measured by increased retention and persistence to program completion, is as much a benefit to students as it is a boost to faculty morale.

Benefits to College and Community

Philosophically, learning communities are a good fit for community colleges, given their mission. The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges defined the term "community" "not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created." In *Community College Review,* Harlacher and Gollattscheck speak of the ultimate objective of community colleges as not just serving their communities, but developing community. "The ultimate objective of the learning community is the improvement of community life through the renewed ability of individual citizens to participate in the affairs of the community, to cope successfully with continuous social and cultural change, to contribute to the economic stability and well-being of the community as productive workers rather than liabilities, to partake of and contribute to our cultural heritage through worthwhile use of leisure time, and to collectively strengthen the various institutions and organizations that make up the community" (Harlacher and Gollattscheck, 1992).

As more colleges are understanding the rationale for and the benefits of learning communities, they are moving closer to fulfilling their ultimate vision and mission. Explaining the impact of learning communities at his own institution, one administrator affirmed, "We are beginning to live up to our vision statement, which says Jackson Community College is a community of learning" (Howser, 1998). ◆

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Be a part of *Innovations* **2006**, March 19-22 at the Hilton Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia. The 2006 conference is sponsored by the League for Innovation in the Community College. For more information see *http://www.league.org/2006/.*

The *2006 Connections Conference* sponsored by the Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois State University will be held April 11-12, 2006 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Springfield, Illinois. For more information, see *http://www.connectionsproject.ilstu.edu*.

The *48th Council for the Study of Community Colleges' Annual Conference* will be held April 20-21, 2006 in conjunction with the AACC 86th National Convention in Long Beach, California. See *http://www.cscconline.org/conferences.htm.*

A Call to Action is the **2006 AACC Convention** theme to be held April 22-25, 2006 in Long Beach, California. For more information, see *http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/NewsandEvents/AACC_Convention1/Annual_Convention.htm.*

The League for Innovation's *Annual Conference on Information Technology (CIT)* will be held at the Charlotte Convention Center, Charlotte, North Carolina October 22-25, 2006. For more information see *http://www.league.org/2006cit/.*

Plan now to attend the *2006 NCSD Conference* October 22-24 at the Sheraton Hotel in Tacoma, Washington. *http://www.NCSDonline.org*.

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