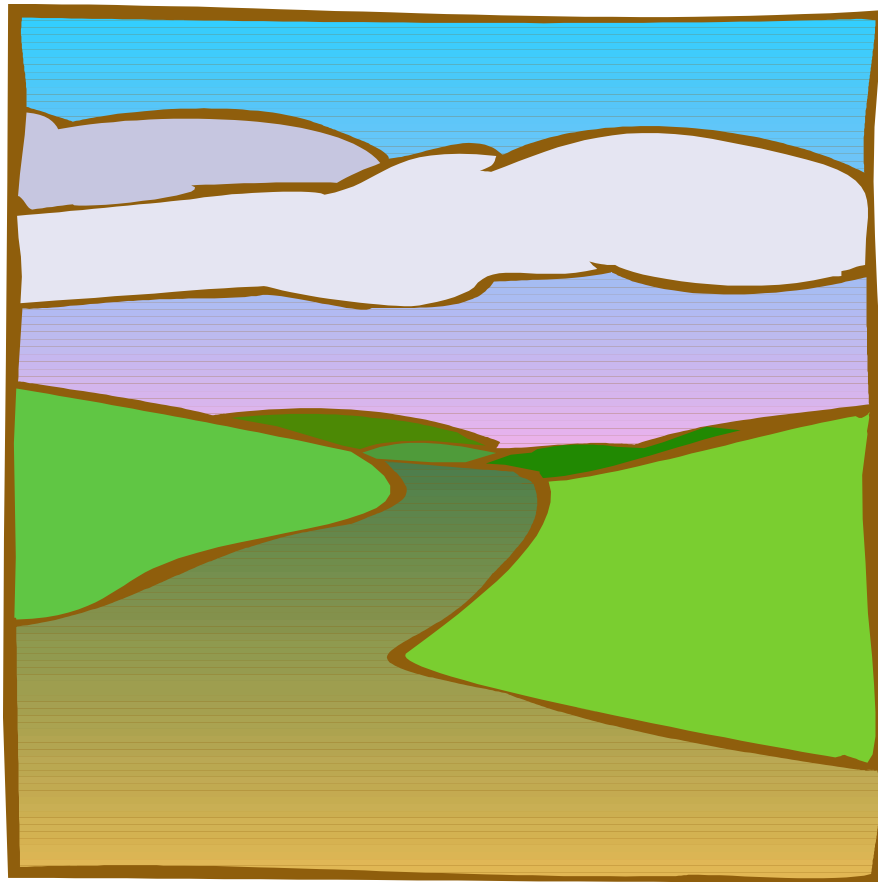


# Learning Communities Faculty Handbook Fall 2005



*Planning for the Semester, Planning for the Future*



# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>   | 2  |
| <b>SECTION I THE LEARNING COMMUNITIES @ TEMPLE UNIVERSITY</b>   |    |
| Overview of Learning Communities (What is a learning community?)  | 5  |
| Faculty Roles   | 12 |
| Summer Activities   | 13 |
| <b>SECTION II CREATING AND SUSTAINING A LEARNING COMMUNITY</b>  |    |
| Program Goals   | 15 |
| How Faculty Describe Learning Communities   | 17 |
| How Students Describe Learning Communities  | 23 |
| The Community Plan Worksheet  | 29 |
| Sample Community Plan   | 31 |
| The Mid-semester Community Report   | 33 |
| <b>SECTION III TEACHING TOOLS AND RESOURCES</b>   |    |
| The 2005 Summer Reading Project: West of Kabul, East of New York<br>Incorporating the Freshman Summer Reading Selection | 36 |
| Student Support Resources   | 37 |
| Planning Calendar   | 41 |
| Contact Information   | 42 |

The Learning Communities at Temple University aim to:

- Promote the **integration of knowledge** across disciplines
- Support students' **transition to college level learning**
- Enhance **connections between and among students and teachers**

## Introduction

### ***The Path We Traveled and the Road Ahead***

The 2005 edition of the Faculty Handbook, like the previous editions, aims to provide faculty in the program with the information and resources necessary for realizing a successful teaching experience. The handbook covers the processes of planning, building, monitoring, and sustaining a linked course learning community. It includes tools and suggestions to help faculty teams achieve integrated curriculum and shared expectations for teaching and learning. For those new to Learning Communities, the handbook provides an overview of program goals and strategies for realizing these goals.

In addition this handbook also includes:

- An essay on definitions, purposes, and models of learning communities
- Information on the summer reading project
- Reports on how faculty and students describe learning communities
- Community planning information
- Information on support resources at Temple
- A planning calendar

The purpose of this handbook, and this introductory letter in particular, is also to help you understand the context for learning communities at Temple University. The program is entering its thirteenth fall semester. From the first offerings in 1993, to the over 50 learning communities available for 2005, the Learning Communities Program has grown into a successful example of learning communities at a large, urban comprehensive university; an accomplishment noted by our involvement in the National Learning Communities Project, the success of our fall 2001 open house, references to our learning communities in recent publications, and regular inquiries about our program. But perhaps the greatest recognition of our program's accomplishments was its being recognized for the past three years by the *U.S. News and World Report's America's Best Colleges Guide* as an example of an academic program that promotes students success.

Learning Communities began at Temple in 1993. Originally funded with a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the primary goals of the program were to improve teaching and learning in the first-year of college and to create community at a large, predominantly commuter institution. Improved retention from the first to second year was a related, important objective.

Over the years, the program successfully involved more Presidential faculty members in the teaching of introductory Core or major courses. Retention rates both for learning communities students and across the University improved significantly. On surveys, learning communities students expressed greater involvement and satisfaction with their college experience than their non-learning communities peers. Concurrently, Temple began to transform itself: three new residence halls and increasing numbers of first-year students residing on campus, higher admissions standards, a new overnight Orientation program for freshman, a remodeled student center, the Tuttleman Learning Center, and the conversion of traditional classrooms to smart classrooms. The environment for learning and community no longer looks as it did in 1993 when the first learning communities were offered. The tenth anniversary mark in 2002-2003 represented an important milestone for the program. It was an opportunity for us to revisit our goals.

In April 2002, a team of faculty and a former learning communities student attended a regional learning communities retreat. The tranquil setting of the retreat facility and the positive learning communities vibes of teachers and learning communities leaders at other schools in the Mid-Atlantic / New York region, motivated us to reflect on our program and develop the new goals: *1) Promote the integration of knowledge across disciplines; 2) Support students' transition to college level learning; and 3) Enhance connections between and among students and teachers.*

As Temple prepares to implement its new General Education Program in 2007, it is time once again time to revisit the goals and purposes of the Learning Communities at Temple University. The student body the program was created to serve in 1993 has changed dramatically. The Core Curriculum courses which are linked to form the current communities will be replaced in 2007 with the new general education courses. There is a critical mass of new faculty and deans who have never participated in learning communities. A workgroup will be convened to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current state of the Learning Communities at Temple University?
2. What is the role of learning communities at Temple University?
3. What will be the relationship between first-year programs and the new general education program?
4. Where do we want the Learning Communities at Temple University to be in 2010?

And as the program moves forward it also has new leadership. Beginning this fall, Michele O'Connor—Assistant Vice Provost for First-Year Programs and Transfer—will lead Temple's first-year programs. Jodi continues at Temple in her role as Associate Vice Provost and Director of Periodic Program Review and will participate in the first-year programs as a freshman seminar teacher and in other ways.

*But first we turn our attention to the students and teachers participating in learning communities this fall...*

We hope you will use the handbook, the learning communities website, the information presented at our summer workshop, and the perspectives and experiences of your colleagues to build a positive *learning in community* experience for your students and an enriching *teaching in community* experience for yourself.

Best wishes for a successful fall 2005 learning community.

***Jodi Levine Laufgraben***  
Associate Vice Provost

***Michele O'Connor***  
Assistant Vice Provost for  
First-Year Programs and Transfer

# SECTION I: THE LEARNING COMMUNITIES @ TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

In this section...

- ➔ Overview of Learning Communities
- ➔ Faculty Roles
- ➔ Summer Activities



# Overview of Learning Communities

## Beyond a Definition of Learning Communities

by Jodi Levine Laufgraben  
Associate Vice Provost

This paper offers a general discussion of the term “learning communities” and of the ways it is commonly applied in higher education. The number of learning communities programs and the attention given to them in the literature and at higher education conferences has been steadily increasing in recent years, but the principles behind learning communities have strong historical roots. The works of John Dewey, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Joseph Tussman are often cited in discussions of the theoretical foundations for learning communities.

The first definition of learning communities that I encountered came from the frequently cited monograph Learning Communities: Creating Connections Among Students, Faculty, and Disciplines:

A learning community is any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses--or actually restructure the curricular material entirely--so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding of and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith, 1990, p. 19).

This definition guides the learning communities initiative at Temple, with the importance of curricular restructuring, integration of material, and interaction of students and teachers emphasized.

Other campuses base their work on the perspective of Alexander Astin who recommends organizing students into small groups—learning communities—to help overcome feelings of isolation common on large campuses. “These can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness, and uniqueness; to encourage continuity and the integration of diverse curricular

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*This paper is adapted from Levine, J.H. (1998) “Beyond the Definition of Learning Communities” Metropolitan Universities, 9(1), pp. 11-16.*

and co-curricular experiences; and to counteract the isolation that many students feel” (Astin, 1985, p. 161). This broader definition of learning communities captures the importance of student interactions in curricular and co-curricular experiences.

### **Models and Characteristics**

In the literature and in national discussion, there is an emerging debate about what constitutes a “learning community.” In their 1990 monograph, Learning Communities: Creating Connections Among Students, Faculty, and Disciplines, Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, and Smith discussed five models: linked courses, clusters, freshman interest groups, federated learning communities, and coordinated studies. These authors have recently condensed their description of models to three: paired or clustered courses, student cohorts in larger classes, and team-taught programs. The models all involve cohorts of students enrolled in common courses, but differ in how the basic unit of instruction and the role of faculty are defined.

**Paired or clustered courses.** In the simplest of the models—linked courses—cohorts of students enroll in two courses. One is usually a content course, while the other is often a first-year writing or skills course. The extent to which the faculty coordinate their linked courses varies from pair to pair. Faculty members teach their courses individually, but work together prior to and during the semester to coordinate syllabi, readings, and assignments. The cluster model is an expanded linked course approach that usually involves three or four discretely taught courses linked by a common theme. The community constitutes the majority of a student’s coursework in a given quarter or semester.

**Cohorts in larger classes.** The freshman interest group (FIG) is a model considered best suited for large institutions. In FIGS, small cohorts of students are placed in sections of two or three lecture courses and meet weekly as a small group in a seminar. There is little to no coordination between faculty teaching the FIG-involved courses, but the FIG seminar provides

an opportunity for students to build connections in what they are learning. Another approach is federated learning communities. In this model, a faculty “master learner” co-enrolls with a cohort of students in a cluster of thematically linked courses. On many campuses, the faculty master learner facilitates a seminar to model good learning behavior and to help students build connections in their courses.

**Team-taught programs.** The most complex model in terms of curricular reform and faculty roles are team-taught programs, commonly referred to as coordinated studies programs. Coordinated studies programs involve small cohorts of students and faculty from several disciplines in interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Some programs require full-time faculty and student involvement. Themes are faculty generated and interdisciplinary, they can be broad or liberal arts based, or emphasize skill development in related disciplines such as math and science.

Regardless of the approach to learning communities adopted by a particular campus, successful learning communities share several characteristics. Learning communities *organize faculty and students into smaller groups*. Many campuses promote “smallness” as a defining characteristic of their learning communities. The motto of the Temple Learning Communities program is “create a small college atmosphere at a large university.” Smaller, more intimate classroom environments help combat the isolation students typically feel from each other and their teachers. In smaller classes, teachers get to know their students and students find it easier to establish study groups with their peers.

Learning communities also *facilitate student socialization* to what it means to be a college student. Increased student interaction with peers reinforces the attitudes, values, and behaviors necessary to succeed in college. Students comment that in learning community



courses they are more comfortable asking questions, speaking in class, and seeking help from a teacher or classmate than in their non-learning communities courses.

Learning communities *provide an ideal setting for new college students to develop a sense of student responsibility*. Students in learning communities are no longer responsible just for their own learning, they are responsible for the learning of a community. This means regularly attending classes, completing assignments in a timely manner, and arriving at class prepared to contribute. As a result, learning community teachers report that student attendance and class participation is greater in learning community courses than in non-learning community courses.

Most importantly, learning communities *challenge the way teachers teach and students learn*. In traditional models of instruction, teachers teach courses to different, separate groups of students. Students travel from one course to another, experiencing their subjects as isolated fragments. Learning communities intentionally cluster courses so both teachers and students experience more connected and enhanced teaching and learning environments.

### **The First-Year Program Learning Communities at Temple University**

Temple University first offered learning communities in 1993. Faculty and administrators looked to learning communities to help them address two key concerns: development of a sense of community and improvement of teaching and learning at the freshman level. When the program first began, only about 200 students participated. Now, over 1000 students enroll in the more than 50 communities offered on the Main or Ambler campuses.

The majority of learning communities at Temple are linked-course communities that satisfy Core, college and / or major requirements. One of the two courses in the community is typically one of two first-year writing courses: Introduction to Academic Discourse (English 0040) or College Composition (English C050). Many students will enroll in a community

featuring a first-year math course such as college mathematics, precalculus, or calculus. Other courses in the communities come from schools/colleges and departments across the University, including: chemistry, women's studies, African-American Studies, criminal justice, psychology, sociology, journalism, theater, film and media arts, and engineering.

In Temple's learning communities, students enroll as a cohort of 15 to 35 students in two courses that share a particular theme. Faculty work together and with the students to integrate course material and to promote collaborative learning, students learning from each other as well as from their teachers.

Many learning communities feature a section of the Freshman Seminar, *Learning for the New Century*. The seminar plays a valuable role in introducing students not only to the goals and expectations for learning communities, but also to what it means to be a college student.

Students practice important skills such as note taking, test taking, critical thinking, and time management, in the context of the other discipline-based courses in the community. In the seminar, students are also introduced to the technology skills and resources, such as e-mail, that they need to succeed in college and beyond.

### **Restructuring to Promote Student Learning**

Why do campuses build learning communities into their existing undergraduate curriculums or install them as the centerpiece of undergraduate curricular reform efforts? For some campuses it is a means to a crucial end: improving student achievement and increasing retention rates. Other campuses look to learning communities to change students' attitudes toward the university community and the learning experience. On some campuses the work is connected to faculty development and efforts to change the way we teach undergraduates, particularly first-year students. For most of us considering or engaged in learning communities work, it is a resounding "all of the above."

The literature supports the “learning communities call” to more actively involve students and faculty as partners in the learning enterprise. We talk about wanting students to learn from each other and their teachers in more active and meaningful ways, however, most college classrooms – the physical layout and the time students spend in them – promote what Jean MacGregor (1990) refers to as the “transmission model of college teaching and learning” (p. 28). In learning communities classrooms, knowledge flows in many directions: student to student, student to teacher, teacher to student, and teacher to teacher.

Learning communities allow us to reorganize the college classroom to promote student learning. In an article in AAHE Bulletin, Peter Ewell (1997) asks us to consider what we know about learning. Ewell says that “learning is about making meaning for each individual learner by establishing and reworking patterns, relationships, and connections” (p. 4). Students learn best when they can make sense of what they are learning. Taken as discrete courses, the only connection between college math and introduction to psychology is that both courses satisfy graduation requirements. But when the courses are linked as a learning community, the math teacher can use psychology journals as the context for studying statistical applications. Students gain a deeper understanding of the relationship of math to other disciplines and both the math and psychology instructors cover important units of instruction.

According to Ewell (1997), approaches that emphasize interpersonal collaboration are most likely to promote learning. Learning Communities, by providing for greater interaction among students, their peers and teachers, allow students to build the support relationships that they need to succeed in college. A critical relationship is the one forged between students and their teachers.

In his often-cited study “What Matters in College,” Alexander Astin (1993) discusses undergraduate student development and the impact of various variables in the college

environment on student development. One important measure is “student orientation of the faculty”. Student orientation of the faculty is defined as the extent to which faculty are interested and involved in student development. It will come to no surprise to the readers of this paper that public universities score low on this measure. Students do not perceive their faculty as interested in or available to assist them with problems. By design, learning communities can increase the quantity and *quality* of faculty involvement with students.

Urban and metropolitan colleges and universities face unique challenges in their efforts to create more collaborative learning environments. Our student body is older and more diverse. The majority of our students commute to campus and work while attending college. And with more and more students working an increasing number of hours, never has the need been more pressing for campuses to make the most of the time undergraduates spend on campus. It is no longer the case that students come to college seeking the meaning of life. They see a college degree as a means to an end: to get a better job and make more money. They spend less time on campus, in some instances only two or three days a week. They look directly at us and pose the follow challenge: “I am willing to spend 12 to 15 hours a week on your campus. (Assuming they are even attending college full-time.) During that time I expect you to teach me, develop me, advise me and train me.”

Many urban campuses are beginning to meet these challenges through uses of learning communities. With the classroom as the “home base,” learning communities are providing students with opportunities for increased interaction with their peers and teachers, greater campus and community involvement, and enhanced academic support. Students are learning in more meaningful ways and at the same time building important connections to the university.

*The sources referenced in this essay and additional readings on learning communities can be found on-line at: <http://www.temple.edu/lc/bibliography.html>.*

## Faculty Roles in Learning Communities

Courses in a learning community are intentionally grouped, with the goal of connecting the content of individual courses and making it more comprehensible and meaningful to students. For instance, when English 40 or C050 is linked with Sociology C050, readings and papers in the English course can shed light on the work in the sociology class, while the sociology teacher can make use of a variety of approaches in which writing supports the learning of content. To make this happen, teachers in the two classes collaborate as they prepare both their individual syllabi and community plan.

The collaboration should apply both to curriculum and to pedagogy. Teachers ought to keep in touch about student problems such as attendance and incomplete work. If these carry over from one class into the other, teachers can make a concerted effort to correct these bad habits. Pedagogical collaboration should also mean an effort to keep heavy assignments from falling due on the same day.

Communication between Learning Communities teachers—about students, about syllabus changes, about how their courses are evolving—is extremely worthwhile. Beyond this, Learning Communities faculty have held joint classes or class activities (block scheduling often permits this), developed joint writing assignments, or traded classes for a day or so. A joint effort at tracking student learning gains could be very rewarding.

Once the term begins, we are all constrained by other responsibilities. So teachers are strongly encouraged to set up meeting times before the start of the semester. E-mail aids communication once the term begins.

Faculty teaching styles need not dovetail completely in a Learning Community, but a clear initial statement about faculty roles is in the interest of both you and your students. Students should know that you will be working as a team. They should also not be allowed to play their teachers off against each other in pursuit of higher grades or lighter assignments.

### Fall 2005 Stipend Policy

Compensation is now aligned primarily with the learning community planning process. Teachers can earn up to a total of \$500 for completion of the following activities:

- Learning Communities Summer Meeting – June 7 (\$100) [paid end of June]
- Participation in *one* of 8 summer planning sessions (\$150) [paid end of July or August]
- Submission of community plan (\$150) [paid end of September for plans submitted by September 10<sup>th</sup>, in October for plans submitted after the 10<sup>th</sup>.]
- Submission of mid-semester community report (\$100) [paid end of November if submitted by November 5th]

Note: Faculty, including teaching assistants, teaching more than one section in a learning community are eligible for an additional \$50 upon submission of a community plan if the sections are linked to different courses. *Teaching assistants will need to complete additional paperwork to receive extra academic year compensation.* Full-time administrators and staff teaching in learning communities are not eligible for stipends.

# Summer Activities

## Summer Meeting

- The focus for this summer's meeting is "Planning for Quality Learning":

In this highly interactive workshop, faculty will talk about establishing grading standards and developing explicit criteria for student work and understanding.

*June 7, Shusterman Hall*

## Summer Planning Brown Bag Sessions

Meet as a teaching team to work on your community plan. Bring your lunch. Beverages and snacks will be provided. Email [tulc@temple.edu](mailto:tulc@temple.edu) to sign-up for a session. Participants attending at least one session **with their co-teachers** will receive a \$150 stipend.

### June

Monday, June 20  
Thursday, June 23

### July

Monday, July 11  
Thursday, July 14  
Monday, July 25  
Thursday, July 28

### August

Monday, August 8  
Monday, August 22

**All sessions scheduled for 12:00 – 1:30 in Conwell Hall, 3B**

\*Note: Teachers are welcome to coordinate their own planning meetings. If you contact us in advance you are still eligible for the planning stipend.

## SECTION II: CREATING AND SUSTAINING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

In this section...

- ➔ Program Goals
- ➔ How Faculty Describe Learning Communities
- ➔ How Students Describe Learning Communities
- ➔ The Community Plan Worksheet
- ➔ Sample Community Plan
- ➔ The Mid-semester Community Report



## Program Goals

The Learning Communities at Temple University aim to:

- Promote the **integration of knowledge** across disciplines
- Support students' **transition to college level learning**
- Enhance **connections between and among students and teachers**

### Strategies for Faculty

A group of experienced Learning Communities faculty met to brainstorm strategies to help teachers achieve these goals and to enhance the teaching and learning experience within and across learning communities.

#### Integration of Knowledge

1. Share your disciplinary definition of knowledge.
2. Engage in good pre-semester conversations about your discipline, course content, pedagogy, and student evaluation.
3. Build your syllabi as a shared activity. State the community theme on each syllabus.
4. Identify areas of common intellectual interests.
5. Understand that the most powerful connections may be the ones the students discover themselves.
6. Look for unplanned opportunities to discuss connections.
7. Regularly meet to discuss student progress and share student work.
8. Identify the skills and strategies students need to succeed in your courses and the learning community.
9. Discuss ways students will construct knowledge in your learning community.
10. Identify ways each course can provide context for the other.
11. Stay informed of the teaching and learning activities in the other course(s) in the community.



## Transition to College Level Learning

1. Identify the support resources that will help students succeed in your community.
2. If possible, identify a former student or community member who can share his/her experiences with these courses.
3. Clearly articulate how students will be graded in each course as well as the expectations for the work.
4. Arrange a time to come together as a group of teachers to discuss the goals and expectation for the learning community.
5. Provide early, consistent, and useful feedback on student progress.
6. Be consistent when establishing attendance policies for the individual courses in the community.
7. Encourage students to form study groups.
8. If your community includes a freshman seminar, meet regularly with the seminar teachers to discuss the study skills students need to succeed in your course(s).

## Connections Between and Among Students and Teachers

1. Schedule student conferences or opportunities for students to visit you during office hours to discuss their academic progress.
2. Use well-designed and structured group work in- and out-of-class to facilitate socialization and learning.
3. Plan an activity early in the semester in which the entire community can participate.
4. Share professional development opportunities in your school, college or department with each other and other Learning Communities faculty.
5. Develop an out-of-class academic activity that students can do with each other and/or their teachers.
6. Encourage students to exchange contact information with at least two other students in the community.
7. Create and regularly use Discussion Boards (Blackboard) or listservs to facilitate out-of-class discussions.
8. Use the LCTeach listserv to share ideas with others teaching in Learning Communities.
9. Create opportunities to get to know your students in more meaningful ways.

# How Faculty Describe Learning Communities

## Reflective Interviews with Faculty Fall 2001

At the end of the fall 2001 semester, 16 teachers who taught in fall learning communities participated in small group reflective interview sessions. Modeled after the reflective interviews conducted at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, the sessions were designed to give faculty an opportunity to share their experiences teaching in a linked course learning community. Faculty discussed their expectations, observations, discoveries, and experiences.

There were two sessions. Four broad questions guided each conversation:

1. What were your original expectations for teaching in this learning community program? Given those expectations, in what ways did the experience meet or not meet them?
2. What else stands out, in terms of observations and discoveries? What did you notice about your students, your colleagues teaching, and your own teaching?
3. What issues need attention in the future: what might future learning community teaching teams consider? What might the institution consider and address?
4. As a result of teaching in this program, what will you take forward in your work?

## Summary of Findings

What were your original expectations for teaching in this learning community program? Given those expectations, in what ways did the experience meet or not meet them?

Participants had expectations for:

1. Student and faculty understanding of the learning community concept
2. Communication with other faculty in the community
3. Level of curricular integration
4. Student achievement

## Student and Faculty Understanding of the Learning Community Concept

One faculty member commented that over time he expected more faculty would get to know about the learning communities program. He felt this is not the case. He also expected students would come to the learning community experience expecting something different from a typical classroom environment. This also hasn't happened.

Teachers assigned late in summer to a particular community seem to have "no expectations" or are less clear as to what learning communities are.

### Communication with other Faculty in the Community

Teachers expected to communicate more frequently with their partner teacher(s) to discuss student behavior and progress. A colleague added that he was expecting a “shared experience for the faculty.” He is familiar with the learning communities model at Stony Brook and remarked that in Temple’s communities the students get to know each other more than the faculty.

Communication and planning is problematic if all teachers in the community are not involved or prepared. Teachers said visiting each other’s courses would help create community and facilitate interdisciplinary learning, but cited scheduling conflicts as a barrier.

### Level of Curricular Integration

Familiarity with each other’s syllabi facilitates teaching around a theme. While one teacher wasn’t anticipating much in terms of curricular connections, another was expecting the curricular pairing to compliment the new syllabus he was designing. He chose to teach in this particular community because of the perceived fit (social class and education) and he was pleased with the pairing.

One teacher commented that the curricular link between mathematics and first-year writing courses is problematic. Two teachers commented that the links in the Fox School of Business and Management clusters were not clear.

Two teachers in one business cluster felt they had some success. First, they combined their classes to bring in a guest speaker from the business world. The writing teacher felt she needed a final project that reflected their experience in the learning community and that would help students see how the courses connected. She felt this helped the students realize the importance of communication in the “real world”—a “real forging of a connection.” Another writing teacher, however, expressed concern that the writing course was still expected to be more flexible in terms of adapting a syllabus to fit the community theme.

How the communities are configured also impacts curricular planning and integration. One teacher found that the community does not mesh as well when two smaller sections feed into a larger class.

Many shared the sentiment that not every assignment needs to be adjusted or shared. One teacher commented that the overall Learning Communities program needs more structure. Program goals need to be clearly defined and better articulated in terms of what teachers are asked to do.

The importance of planning was raised again. A challenge is to have all teachers involved in the planning. The lateness with which some teaching assignments are made was cited as one cause for this problem; concentrating all planning activities in the summer was another.

### Student achievement

One teacher expected that the students would not need as much time and care in terms of skills and resources when the community included a freshman seminar. This was not the case.

An instructor in the Architecture Learning Community, having taught in a community before, was expecting a group of students a little more focused in the reasons for coming to Temple. He did find these students “more directed and motivated than I expected.” “Early on they reacted positively to the discussion format of the class, and brought to our discussions of issues a lot of interesting information.” He also commented that their written work was above average and that below average students made efforts to improve.

### **What else stands out in terms of observations and discoveries?**

What did you notice about your students, your colleagues teaching, your own teaching?

Teachers shared their strategies for creating community and fostering curricular connections. This led to a discussion of the goals for Temple’s Learning Community Program, particularly the expectations for linking courses.

### Community building

Building social and intellectual communities is important. One teacher suggested using in-class activities that brings students together: group exercises, assignments that require skills from other classes, group projects.

Another commented that a class of 100% freshman can be a challenge. One teacher said that this could be fun in some ways, but challenging because of the lack of upperclassmen, classroom leaders. Teachers said they spent more time on socialization and adjustment issues—talking to students about the basics at Temple.

The point was raised that when students bond and feel comfortable it can enhance the desire to do well or they can bond as a social group and more in a negative direction.

The closeness of a learning community group, however, makes students more vocal. Sometimes the topic of conversation can be complaints about other teachers. A listserv intended for students to talk about the other course and general goings-on actually ended up being mostly “whining.”

In learning communities, students feel closer to each other and the teacher (in writing classes in particular). Small groups make the difference. One teacher commented that the energy was infectious. He looked forward to class discussions and felt “their energy activated me, and mine in turn allowed them to give vent to their own energy.”

### Rethinking what it means to be linked

Teachers expressed the importance of asking students what is going on in their other classes. This facilitates interdisciplinary discussions.

This led to a discussion on the expectations for curricular integration. Do the goals for Temple's Learning Community Program really require a curricular theme and sharing of work or are the goals to bring students together and create collegiality? The teacher who raised this issue expressed a need for a central repository of "how to" in terms of the program goals and expectations. He felt too many communities were making up the rules as they went along. He would like to see a standard template for a learning communities course that could be applied regardless of who teaches the class.

One writing instructor commented that content instructors need a better understanding of the goals and standards of first-year writing courses. She added that the links would be stronger if content teachers thought about the role of writing in their disciplines or professions.

Another teacher commented that she noticed how her teaching style differed from that of the other instructor in the community. This impacted how she worked and interacted with the same group of students.

### Realizing curricular connections

Shared assignments can help attendance across the community. Another teacher suggested using creative writing assignments in the non-writing courses in the community.

What worked best for one social science professor was when skills or material were "complimentary," which he described as a step-down from shared. He felt complimenting the learning in the other courses could lead to conversations about disciplinary differences as well as different outlets for expression. Many agreed that the real excitement is when students discover links.

"Links work better when they are not obvious." This teacher explained that his writing and media community ("too much media, students were bored") was not as successful as his academic discourse and psychology community. It was more powerful when students had to make the link.

This discussion led to the question of whether or not teachers should worry about forging curricular links that may not naturally be there. It was suggested that the program outline the different types of connections:

- Pedagogical (shared teaching approaches)
- Skills
- Content

Teachers suggested joint projects, assignments across the community, as one strategy for interdisciplinary learning. Several issues were raised, including would a shared assignment be less stressful for students? One writing teacher thought a shared project would help with the teaching of the research paper in College Composition.

## Changes to teaching

A Criminal Justice professor commented that he now uses community-building activities in all of his courses because he likes the results he saw in his learning communities sections. The same teacher implemented a mandatory attendance policy on days group projects are presented.

Two Computer Science teachers now bring in a Writing Center Consultant to discuss how to write an essay.

## **What issues need attention in the future: what might future learning community teaching teams consider? What might the institution consider and address?**

The reflective interviews closed with a discussion on ways to improve the learning communities experience for students and teachers.

## Advice to Future Teaching Teams

Suggestions included:

- Designate a leader (facilitator, motivator, convener) for each community
- Conduct a midterm meeting, on a day and time determined prior to the start of the semester, to discuss student progress.
- Schedule one or two shared classes (organized visits with planned activities)
- Plan an informal gathering at the beginning of the semester to talk about the goals of the learning communities program as well as the goals for the individual learning community.
- Get involved with the other class(s) in the community; observe presentations or final projects; identify occasions to invite the other teachers to your class

## **Changes at the program level**

- Identify spaces on campus where teachers and/or groups of students can meet outside of class
- Help teaching teams send students welcome letters prior to the start of the semester
- Provide incentives to departments that participate (One teacher mentioned that the commitment to participate for some is at the personal and not department level.)
- Use current faculty to recruit participation from other faculty in their department.
- Consider a “Learning Communities Orientation”: a program event involving teachers and students across all communities.
- Create a Blackboard community for Learning Communities faculty

The issue of institutional rewards and recognition for this type of teaching was a major concern. The need for better pay for part-time instructors was also mentioned. The lateness of teaching assignments, particularly for dean’s appointments and teaching assistants, was cited as an obstacle to pre-semester curricular planning.

## **Conclusions and Next Steps**

When faculty meet as a full teaching team, prior to the fall semester, to plan their community they are more satisfied with the overall experience particularly their abilities to create community and integrate course content. Teachers would like to collaborate more during the semester, even visit each other's classes, but scheduling meetings is a challenge.

Students bond in learning communities. They are comfortable in class, participate in discussions, and raise questions. Students don't always enter learning communities with a clear understanding of the goals and expectations, but when they discover the curricular connections between the disciplines, it can be a powerful experience.

As a result of feedback provided during the reflective interviews, several changes were made to the Learning Communities Program. Program goals were revisited and the new goals were widely disseminated. The faculty handbook was updated to include definitions and examples of curricular integration. The community plan worksheet was revised to include the mid-semester report. Teachers are now strongly encouraged to meet in the middle of the semester to discuss student progress and to review their curricular goals.

# How Students Describe Learning Communities

## Summary of Open-Ended Items from the Temple University Fall 2001 Learning Communities Questionnaire

Nancy Morris  
Jodi Levine Laufgraben  
Peter Jones

The aim of this project is to gather information that can be used to enhance the student and teacher experience in learning communities, and particularly to strengthen our model of linked courses. This year's survey project aimed not only to test the refined survey instrument but also to generate data that could be used to explain the findings of both the previous year's survey and the current one. To add depth to the statistical analysis, and provide a better understanding of student reactions to their experiences in learning communities, we decided to gather qualitative data, in the form of four open-ended items added to the questionnaire. Students were first asked to summarize the theme of their community, to see to what extent the notion of a curricular theme had taken hold. They were then asked to comment on what they considered to be the best and worst aspects of their experiences. Space was also provided for additional comments.

Coding the open-ended responses was an interactive process conducted by two members of the assessment work group. Both members read all of the responses. One member then tallied the students' answers, identified patterns that emerged from them, and grouped the responses into broad categories as suggested by the responses themselves. According to Fowler (1993), the purpose of this approach is to "create categories that group answers that are analytically similar and to differentiate between answers that are different" (p. 126). The other work group member reviewed the categories and groupings.

A total of 615 questionnaires were used for the qualitative analysis.\* Of these, 23 respondents did not answer any of the four open-ended items. Of the 592 who did write in responses, many did not answer all four questions. Therefore the number of respondents for each of the four items is different. Some responses contained multiple parts that fit into different categories, so the total number of responses to a given item may be larger than the number of students responding to that item. Some responses were discarded because they were unclear, and difficult or impossible to categorize.

### Learning Community Theme

Prior to the start of the semester, each learning community teaching team is asked to complete a community plan—a worksheet outlining a curricular theme for the community, teaching and learning goals, and strategies for meeting the stated objectives. All teachers in a learning community are encouraged to state the theme on their syllabi and to reemphasize it throughout the semester. Themes selected for this semester included "Thinking Beyond the Self," "Negotiating Difference," and "History and Identity."

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\* A total of 660 surveys comprised the data set for the statistical analysis, including 45 surveys returned after the qualitative data set was produced and analyzed. The open-ended responses on the late surveys were reviewed and are consistent with the findings presented here. To view the survey and statistical analysis: [www.temple.edu/lc](http://www.temple.edu/lc).



The first open-ended question on the survey asked the students to “briefly summarize” the common theme of their learning community. Of the 615 survey respondents, 376 – or 61% -- answered this question. Their responses could be grouped into five categories: 1) articulation of the curricular theme; 2) names of disciplines or specific classes in the community; 3) responses related to the process of learning; 4) responses related to the goals of learning communities and/or to curricular connections; and 5) no recognition of a theme.

The largest category, with 23% of the responses to this item, was the direct articulation of a theme. According to one student: “The theme was history and identity and how these things are perceived in history.” One student in a community pairing Introduction to Women’s Lives and College Composition generalized the formal theme articulated by the instructors—“Constructing Self, Negotiating Cultures”—to “Women’s lives and struggles in America.” Some students recognized that a theme existed, but didn’t feel the curricular connections were effective. “They tried to connect the classes through the Vietnam War Memorial topic, but it didn’t really work out.”

The next category in terms of number of responses -- 19% of the responses to this survey item -- was mention of the primary course topic or the discipline, such as international relations, realism, criminal justice, or business.

Seventeen percent of the students who responded to this question perceived the common theme to be not the curricular theme or the subject, but rather something related to the process of learning, such as working in groups or learning specific skills. For example, one student summarized the theme as “group work and listening to everyone’s opinion.” For another student the emphasis was “communication through writing.” Another student listed a practical benefit of the course as a theme: “[It] showed me a lot of techniques of studying.”

Eleven percent of the respondents to this item identified the theme as related to the learning environment or the overall goals of learning communities, rather than as the curricular theme itself. These responses centered on the learning community as an aid to adapting to college life and as a way to make friends. One student described the theme(s) as “preparing new students for success in introduction courses.” For another the theme related to communication between not only the students but also the teachers: “getting to know the classmates as personally as possible, and not just knowing them as part of the class, and the communication between both instructors was great.” Several students in the Fox School of Business and Management Learning Communities perceived the theme to be career oriented: “To prepare students for the business world.”

Finally, 4% of those who filled in this survey item wrote in responses that indicated no recognition of a theme. One such response, for example, was, “don’t understand question.”

### **Best Aspects of the Learning Communities Experiences**

Almost all of the survey respondents (552 of 615, or 90% of the total) filled in an answer to the open-ended question “What was the single best aspect of your learning community experience?” Responses were grouped into four categories: 1) making friends; 2) the learning experience; 3) small classes; and 4) other/miscellaneous.

For 71% of those who answered this question, the best aspect of their learning community concerned making friends and getting to know their peers. The overall tone of these responses is summed up by a student’s comment that “the friendships I have made with students in the learning community [is] definitely the single best aspect.” Another student described this process as “making new friendships and watching them blossom like flowers.” A student in the

Women's Studies Learning Community described the best aspect as "getting to meet so many great women."

Having two or more classes with the same group of people seemed to be the key to many students' perceptions that their learning community facilitated getting to know their peers. As one student put it, "I got to know more people and actually learned their names." Another said, "working with the same people throughout 3 courses developed a bond."

Included in this 71% are numerous responses that indicated that attending classes with the same group of classmates enhanced not only the social environment but also the educational experience. One student commented, for example, "the single best aspect was having the same students in each class. It made the learning community experience more comfortable." "I saw the same people all the time so when I needed help I knew where to find them," said another.

Other students commented on the community nature of the experience and how the structure supported their learning. "The best aspect [was the] teachers and their ability to bring the class together as one group. It made it a lot easier to understand and pay attention." Some students recognized long-term or out-of-class benefits. "Making friends and being able to work with them outside the classroom." "Getting comfortable with students; and learning good study skills."

Besides the positive social and educational aspects of attending classes with the same group of people, one other category of responses accounted for a substantial portion of the total responses to the question of what was the most positive aspect of learning communities. Seventeen percent of those who filled in this open-ended survey item commented on the learning experience itself, expressing general appreciation for class topics, material, activities, or the instructor. It is not possible to tell from these responses whether such positive experiences are due to the learning community structure, or to other factors such as good teaching or a student's affinity with a particular subject, but the students interpreted these positive aspects as related to the learning community. A typical response in this category was, "sociology taught me a lot this semester. I've learned about racism, economy, class structure and society as a whole. I will use what I've been taught in the future." For other students the best aspect was the types of learning activities in class, such as presentations, discussions, or group work "[The best aspect was] class discussions—real life issues were discussed."

Three percent of student respondents appreciated being in small classes, a characteristic that is not limited to learning community classes but that is built into the learning community experience. "The small class sizes made the professor easily accessible." "The class was very small, so I received the needed attention." Relatedly, many students mentioned the learning environment as the best aspect. "The fact that I was able to actually feel a part of a classroom and not just a number. The interaction between students and teacher." Another 3% noted the usefulness of the learning community for making the transition to college.

Smaller numbers of student comments about the best aspect of their learning community experience included appreciation of coordinated due dates for assignments and of the way learning community classes related to each other. One student recognized the value of exposure to new ideas through the learning community: "It helped me open my ideas and beliefs to everyone else's ideas and beliefs."

## Worst Aspects of the Learning Communities Experiences

Far fewer students than had answered the previous item about the best aspect of their experience answered the complementary question. Two hundred eighty, or 46% of the 615 survey respondents, filled in the open-ended survey item asking “What was the single worst aspect of your learning community experience?” We grouped these responses into three categories: 1) those that had to do with aspects of the learning community itself, 2) those that had to do with a specific class rather than the learning community as a whole; and 3) complaints about class logistics, particularly scheduling.

More than half of the responses to this item (55%) concerned aspects of the learning community approach. These responses fell into several clear subcategories. The largest subcategory comprised those students who did not like taking classes with the same group of people. Although responses to the previous questionnaire item indicated that for most students taking courses with a common cohort was the best aspect of the learning community, 20% of the total responses to the “worst aspect” item (9 % of the total survey respondents) said just the opposite. As one put it, the worst aspect was “having to do everything with the same people.” Another student wanted opportunities to meet students outside the community. “Miss meeting more people, stuck with same group.” “I did not get to meet as many new people, because the same people were in several of my classes.” Another student was frustrated by the way groups formed within the learning community: “Some of the students formed their own little groups and I felt like I couldn’t be my true self around them.”

Several survey respondents straddled the fence on the issue of taking classes with the same people. For example, one student wrote that the best aspect of the learning community experience was “same people. Having nice friends.” But the same student wrote that the worst aspect of the learning community experience was “same people. Got sick of them.”

A subset of the group of students whose “worst aspect” concerned characteristics of the learning community itself consisted of those who commented that they were unhappy with the group work that is characteristic of learning community teaching. This group comprised 11% of all the respondents who answered the “worst aspect” question. “Some of the group work was annoying because the group members was not working together well.” “[The worst aspect was] group projects. They aren’t like in the business world – money makes people care more about them.”

A smaller number of students felt the community had too much of a theme or curricular connection: “The classes were too closely related, began to get bored.” “Back to back class was hard sometimes especially since we were talking about the same subject.” “I liked studying the same thing in the 2 classes – but sometimes it became too much of the same thing.”

Contrarily, other students commented on the lack of connections between their learning community classes. “[The] classes did not really connect; just two [classes] with the same people.” [The worst aspect was] “the fact that I do not understand how my math and English were related.”

While the above responses singled out aspects that were related to the structure of the learning community, for 33% of the students who answered the questionnaire item, the worst aspect of the learning community was a specific class, professor, or assignment. About half of these comments concerned the one-credit, freshman seminar that was linked to fifteen learning communities. The freshman seminar is a student success course that is offered as a stand-alone course or as a third course in a learning community. Some students criticized the freshman seminar for having too great a workload. “The worst aspect was doing more work in a one credit class than I was responsible for in a three credit class.” Others felt the opposite: “freshman

seminar class was a waste of time ... we didn't do much." And not all students recognized a personal need for the seminar. "I think the worst aspect was having to take the freshman seminar. I guess it would be useful for some people, but I didn't get much out of it."

Asked what was the worst aspect of their learning community, 17% of the 280 respondents to this item listed logistical aspects such as early morning classes (8:40), other scheduling issues, or conflicting due dates. "[The worst aspect was] the length of the classes (one hour two minutes back to back) drained my energy and I had trouble keeping attentive." "[The worst aspect was] when I had a presentation and a paper due the same day." Other students were frustrated by their academic performance and cited their grades on papers or exams as the worst aspect.

Finally, eight students – 3% of the respondents to this question -- took the time to write something positive in response to the question about the worst aspect of the learning community. Examples of these responses are: "no worst aspect," and "there were no aspects in either class that I would consider bad."

### **Additional comments**

103 students filled in the space allocated for "is there anything else you would like to tell us?" Their comments fell broadly into four categories: 1) generally positive; 2) generally negative; 3) lack of curricular theme; and 4) suggestions.

Sixty-four percent of these respondents provided positive comments. Echoing the "best aspect" responses, students primarily cited the social benefits of getting to know people and forming friendships. "Glad I was part of this LC; had fun, met new people and learned a lot about Temple." "LC made me more comfortable with a new big school. [I] made friends." Others commented on how the learning community supported their transition to college. "[I] enjoyed the learning community. [I] think it is helpful to freshmen and the new college experience." "[It was] a great experience for me to meet new people. Entering college was an excellent learning experience." "Learning Communities made my first semester at Temple easy."

Some students appreciated what they learned. "I learned a lot through the professor and other students." "[I] have more close friendships. It also helped my study skills and habits." "English 50 has really improved my writing ability." Another student commented on the curricular connections. "[The learning community] really helped me to draw parallels between my classes."

Negative comments – 11% of the responses to this item – varied from complaints about freshman seminar to the nonspecific statement "I really did not like the LC."

Ten percent of responses to this item concerned a perceived lack of connection between the classes. Several students stated that they enjoyed the experience, but did not see a curricular theme. "[The] program is great for students to get close, but courses had nothing to do with each other." "I do think the LCs are great, even if the courses don't relate."

Strengthening the curricular connections was cited as an area for improvement. Other suggestions included: 1) combine class meetings for more activities, social events, discussions; 2) plan activities outside of class; and 3) offer learning communities the entire first year.

Many students commented that they would enroll again if given the chance and that they would suggest it to other students. Some thought learning communities should be available not only for freshmen, but for all students. "The learning community has helped me to make very good friends. Thank you. I liked the learning community very much!"

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, the responses to these open-ended questionnaire items indicate that these students had a positive experience in their learning communities. Many felt that taking classes with a common group of students supported their adjustment to college. Many also translated the social benefits of taking classes with a common group of students into academic advantages—exposure to new ideas, forming study groups, asking a peer for help. An articulated goal of the program is to support students' transitions to college level learning and students recognized this aspect of learning communities in their comments.

These responses show both shared aspects across learning communities and variety among them. For example, while most students recognized a curricular or academic focus for their communities, there was considerable difference in how students articulated the themes. Some were able to state the theme explicitly, some felt that the theme was generally about learning, and a few students were unaware that there had been a theme at all. Regarding logistics, some students were pleased because the due dates for assignments in the different classes in their learning community were staggered, while others were disgruntled because the dates overlapped. These contrasting responses indicate variations in the depth of curricular integration and coordination between the teachers of linked courses.

Future directions of this project will include matching the clusters developed from the quantitative analysis to their qualitative responses. We are also considering focus groups with students to further probe the student academic and social experience in learning communities.

## Reference

Fowler, F. J. (1993) Survey Research Methods (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

The Learning Communities at Temple University  
Community Plan Worksheet

Semester: Fall 2005

An electronic version of the plan can be found on-line at [www.temple.edu/lc](http://www.temple.edu/lc). Click on "For Teachers."

| Teacher | Department | Course | Campus Phone | E-mail |
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**Learning Community Title:** Provide a title denoting the curricular theme for your learning community. The descriptive title should be no longer than 5-7 words and should appear on the syllabus for each individual course in the community. [Example: *Hyperlink to History* might be the title for a learning community pairing “American History Since 1877” with “Introduction to Internet.”]

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**Curricular Plan**

1. What central questions or themes will your learning community explore?
2. How will the individual courses integrate the theme for this learning community?
3. What pedagogical strategies (Examples: collaborative learning, group projects, journal writing) will be implemented to promote the **integration of knowledge**?

4. In what ways will this learning community support students' **transition to college level learning**?
  
5. In what ways will this learning community experience enhance **connections between and among students and teachers**?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. If your learning community includes a section of the freshman seminar (Learning for the New Century), how do you plan to incorporate the seminar in terms of advancing the curricular theme?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What skills or knowledge should students acquire as a result of their participation in this learning community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How will you assess student progress in terms of the outcomes described above?

Submit to Michele O'Connor by September 9, 2005. Reports can be sent via e-mail to [tulc@temple.edu](mailto:tulc@temple.edu) or through campus mail to 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Conwell Hall.

# Sample Community Plan

## Fall 2004

Dr. Robert Kidder (Sociology C050, Introduction to Sociology)  
Dr. Kathy Houff (English 040, Introduction to Academic Discourse)  
Dr. Rachael Groner (English C050, College Composition)

### **Theme: *Creating Community***

1. What central questions or themes will your learning community explore?
  - That there are many different sources of knowledge and culture.
  - That everyday life is one such source of knowledge and culture.
  - That our personal views of the world are shaped by our own background and life experiences, and they reflect perception and emotion as much as fact and reality.
  - That students should try to get outside their comfort zones, and that we will encourage them to view the world in new and different ways.
  - What is the role of the individual in shaping both knowledge and culture?
  - What does it mean to have a diverse community and how can we best study such a community?
  - How is academic discourse divorced from real life and what are the costs/benefits of such a separation?
  - What is the relationship of the local to the global and of communities to cultures? How do individuals interact with the world on each of these levels?

2. How will the individual courses integrate the theme for this learning community?

In *English 40 and 50*, there is an emphasis on critical reading and thinking through assigned essays on social theory, cultural studies, fiction, and memoir by authors from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. There are also several films and cultural texts (television, print ads, etc.) that will be viewed and utilized in the classroom and in assignments. In the case of English 40, the topic of these texts is gender; in English 50, the topic of these readings is American popular culture as it is viewed from in and out of the U.S. The primary texts of both courses, however, will be the student's papers and most of the course's attention is on critical thinking, writing, and reading. *Sociology 50* introduces students to the study of sociology. Units include culture, social structure and interaction, economy and society, stratification, social change, socialization, education, deviance, inequality and identity, race, gender, and the institution of the family. Each unit uses readings, movies, lectures, and classroom discussions to contrast student perceptions, views and beliefs of/about issues in sociology with accepted knowledge in the field.

3. What pedagogical strategies (Examples: collaborative learning, group projects, journal writing) will be implemented to promote the integration of knowledge?
  - Assigned readings of essays and books
  - Online writing (weblog, discussion forum)
  - Quizzes based on readings and lectures
  - In- and out-of-class activities to challenge existing notions of gender, sex, race, and socioeconomic class
  - Group work and collaborative writing in and out of class
  - Journal writing
  - Term papers that require students to integrate a number of sources from the library and the local community



4. In what ways will this learning community support students' transition to college level learning?
  - Learn to assess nature and quality of knowledge sources
  - Development of individual and peer-focused composition and presentational skills
  - Develop a healthy skepticism about "knowing" facts or holding beliefs about what is "natural" and "normal"
  - Develop awareness of opinions and views of others
  - Broaden their intellectual experiences
  - Emphasize what is expected of them in terms of academic writing (e.g. the difference between expressing an opinion and forming a sound argument)
  - Get students to recognize the link between writing to learn and learning to write
  - We will stress the importance of close reading of a text
5. In what ways will this learning community experience enhance connections between and among students and teachers?
  - Courses will emphasize and encourage in-class discussions as part of normal classroom experience
  - Faculty members will visit each other's classrooms so that students see the classes as collaborative
  - Courses will involve group exercises that encourage peer learning and communication with instructor on both individual and group level
  - Courses will illustrate connections among involved faculty – meetings, discussion, etc. - about LC theme, course content and student progress
  - Focusing on the act of writing as a collaborative effort
6. If your learning community includes a section of the freshman seminar (Learning for the New Century), how do you plan to incorporate the seminar in terms of advancing the curricular theme?

Courses will encourage students to incorporate skills into classroom assignments

7. What skills or knowledge should students acquire as a result of their participation in this learning community?
  - Library skills and basic research skills
  - Collaborative and organizational skills for group work
  - Communication skills for written and oral assignments
  - Analytic reading and writing skills
8. How will you assess student progress in terms of the outcomes described above?
  - Through multiple graded assignments combining take-home and in-class work as well as quizzes and examinations
  - Through personal interaction with students in and out of class
  - Several mandatory, twenty-thirty minute student-teacher conferences
  - Close reading of student papers
  - Through written comments from instructor to student and emphasis on revision using these comments.

**The Learning Communities at Temple University  
Mid-Semester Community Report**

**Semester:     Fall 2005**

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| <i>An electronic version of the plan can be found on-line at <a href="http://www.temple.edu/lc">www.temple.edu/lc</a>. Click on "For Teachers."</i> |
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| Teacher | Department | Course | Campus Phone | E-mail |
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**Learning Community Title (Theme)** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please look back at your Community Plan worksheet developed at the beginning of the semester and discuss the following questions in light of the progress made up to this point in the semester. The intention of this mid-semester meeting is to give everyone a chance to get together and talk about how things are going in your learning community.*

1. Given the original goals of your learning community, what do you think has worked well? What has not worked so well? What is still left to be done?

2. In what ways have your classes been integrated thus far? How successful do you feel these integrations have been? What are you planning for the future (examples: visiting classes, team teaching, assigning the same reading, same writing assignment)?

3. If there is a Freshman Seminar attached to your community, in what way has the Seminar been incorporated into the Learning Community? How has this incorporation worked in terms of advancing the goals and curricular theme of your community?
  
4. In what ways, if any, have your students demonstrated knowledge that they are part of a Learning Community (examples: direct reference to the Learning Community, use of materials from other classes, references to other professors)?
  
5. Are there students that need additional help or support in doing well in your classes? In what ways can the Learning Community help these students (examples: discussion of student behavior by instructors, keeping track of absences, email or other contact)?
  
6. What have the instructors in the community done to facilitate cross-disciplinary learning in the classes? What other things could the instructors do?

Submit to Michele O'Connor by November 4, 2005. Please send via e-mail to [tulc@temple.edu](mailto:tulc@temple.edu) or through campus mail to 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Conwell Hall.

## SECTION III: TEACHING TOOLS AND RESOURCES

In this section...

- 2005 Freshman Summer Reading Project
- Support Support Resources
- Planning calendar
- Contact information



# Incorporating the Freshman Summer Reading Selection into your Learning Community

*West of Kabul, East of New York*  
by Tamim Ansary

Resource materials for the 2005 Freshman Summer Reading Project can be found on-line at [www.temple.edu/summerreading](http://www.temple.edu/summerreading). Please incorporate the book and its themes into your courses and across your learning community. The author will visit Temple on **Thursday, September 8**. *Please require or strongly encourage your students to attend his talk and/or other events related to the book.*

## Suggestions for incorporating the summer reading text:

1. Use the “Dozen for Discussion” questions ([www.temple.edu/summerreading](http://www.temple.edu/summerreading)) as talking points, journal entries, or short writing assignments.
2. Include a “When I was growing up...” component to an icebreaker/get acquainted activity or an autobiography assignment.
3. Ask students to write about or discuss their perceptions of ethnicity, culture, family, and identity. Ask them to reflect on the themes in the book that are parallel to their childhood and family.
4. If your seminar is linked to a learning community, consult the other teachers in the community about their plans to use the book. Focus on a specific happening in *West of Kabul, East of New York* that relates to the theme for your learning community.
5. Ask students to write a critique of Ansary’s talk or of the book.
6. Require students to attend one of the events scheduled around the book and author’s visit and ask students to write a reflection paper.
7. Encourage your students to enter the 2005 Freshman Summer Reading Project Diamond Dollars Creativity contest. Go to [www.temple.edu/summerreading](http://www.temple.edu/summerreading) for contest guidelines.
8. Require students to attend one of the films being shown as part of the Freshman Summer Reading Project Film Series. Ask students to write a paper or prepare a presentation summarizing the film and how it relates to the book or their personal experiences.
9. Have students use the Web to find reviews of the book or information about the author.
10. Have students prepare questions they might like to ask the author.
11. Conduct an in-class debate on an issue or question raised in the book.
12. Assign a research project on Afghanistan, Islam, or other topics raised in the book.

# Student Support Resources @ Temple University

## Main Campus

### **Academic Resource Center**

(215) 204-2500

e-mail: [dus@temple.edu](mailto:dus@temple.edu)

[www.temple.edu/dus](http://www.temple.edu/dus)

*The Academic Resource Center is an advising and support program for students who have not yet declared a major. There is an Academic Information Library where you can research academic majors and careers as well as use self-assessment tools to help you identify your career interests and aptitudes. Professional, student and faculty advisors provide information on different majors. Advisors assist students by appointment or on a walk-in basis.*

Curtis Hall 113

M, Th, F 8:30a.m. – 5:00p.m.

T, W 8:30a.m. – 6:30p.m.

### **Career Development Services**

(215) 204 – 7981

e-mail: [careerd@temple.edu](mailto:careerd@temple.edu)

*This office provides assistance for students through workshops and individual counseling in career exploration and planning. By using this center, students are better able to make effective career decisions. Cooperative Education, Student Employment and the Extern Program are coordinated by Career Services and can provide valuable work experience. Individual counseling is available by appointment.*

Second Floor, Mitten Hall

M – F 8:30a.m. – 5:00p.m.

[www.temple.edu/careerdev](http://www.temple.edu/careerdev)

### **Office of International Services**

(215) 204 – 7708

e-mail: [ois@temple.edu](mailto:ois@temple.edu)

*Foreign students are assisted with problems they might face adjusting to a new culture and also receive counseling on immigration laws, housing, social events in the area, and admissions and financial aid requirements of the University.*

203B Vivacqua Hall

M – F 8:30a.m. – 5:00p.m.

[www.temple.edu/OIS](http://www.temple.edu/OIS)

### **Disability Resources and Services**

(215) 204 – 1280

e-mail: [drs@temple.edu](mailto:drs@temple.edu)

[www.temple.edu/disability](http://www.temple.edu/disability)

*The goal of Disability Resources and Services is the mainstreaming of all students with disabilities. This means that the disabled student is integrated into the classroom process as much as possible. It also means that the disabled students are encouraged to avail themselves of such general University services as Academic Advising, the Counseling Center and Career Services. Special services for hearing and visually impaired students are provided including: individual academic testing arrangements, typing services and dictation assistance. Anyone interested in volunteering or desiring more information is invited to stop in the office at any time.*

Ritter Annex, Room 100

(215) 204 – 1786 (TTY)

M – F 8:30a.m. – 5:00p.m.

### **Campus Alcohol and Substance Awareness (CASA)**

(215) 204 – 7276

*The CASA program offers short-term individual and group counseling referral for students with alcohol and other drug concerns on all campuses. Support groups are provided for individuals in early recovery as well as for adult children of alcoholics/dysfunctional families. CASA also sponsors a peer education/ counseling network called PACT (Peer Advocacy Counseling and Training). PACT offers workshops to the campus community on a wide variety of issues – co-dependent relationships, stress, etc. PACT also staffs a hotline, a drop-in center and resource library. CASA services are free and confidential.*

Lower Level, Sullivan Hall

M – F 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

**Math/Sciences Resource Center**

(215) 204 – 8466

e-mail: [msrc@temple.edu](mailto:msrc@temple.edu)

*The MSRC is a student-centered learning and enrichment facility that has been established to offer academic support in science and mathematics. The Center's goal is to help ALL students, those who may experience difficulty and those who strive for academic excellence. In addition to tutoring, the MSRC offers support services such as group tutorials/supplementary instruction, a resource library and Internet accessible computers equipped with academic software packages. Appointments are NEVER necessary and all services are FREE.*

Curtis Hall, Room 17

Hours Vary

[www.temple.edu/MSRC](http://www.temple.edu/MSRC)

**Russell Conwell Educational Services Center**

(215) 204 – 1252

[www.temple.edu/RCC](http://www.temple.edu/RCC)

*This center is designed to enhance the educational achievement of students traditionally denied access to higher education: adults, veterans, women, minorities and educationally disadvantaged students. The center offers specialized pre-admissions counseling, academic skill development programs, community outreach programs and academic counseling. All of these programs contribute to the admission, retention and graduation of this unique student population. A schedule of study skills workshops (open to all Temple students) is available in the Russell Conwell Center as well as in the Academic Resource Center in Curtis Hall, Room 113.*

202 Vivacqua Hall

M – F 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

**Student Assistance Center**

(215) 204 – 8531

[assist@temple.edu](mailto:assist@temple.edu)

*This center is staffed by trained undergraduates and administrative professional and provides information on New Student Orientation, Leadership Development programs, transportation and tutoring.*

First Floor, SAC

M – F 8:30a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

[www.temple.edu/assistance](http://www.temple.edu/assistance)

**Tuttleman Counseling Services**

(215) 204 – 7276

[www.temple.edu/counseling](http://www.temple.edu/counseling)

*Tuttleman Counseling Services helps students achieve a satisfying growth experience during and after college. This office is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of counseling and clinical psychologists and mental health professionals engaged largely in individual, couples, and small group counseling for personal growth. Special focus groups are offered each semester in such areas as study skills development, interpersonal relations, child abuse and sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse, assertiveness, math anxiety and handling emotions such as anger or fear. Services are free of charge to the University community. Interviews are confidential.*

Lower Level, Sullivan Hall

M – F 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

**University Writing Center**

(215) 204 – 0702

e-mail: [uwcenter@temple.edu](mailto:uwcenter@temple.edu)

*The University Writing Center operates on a drop-in basis and offers one-on-one and small group tutoring, workshops on common issues in writing, on-going writing and reading groups, computer workstations, and assistance and information on other support services. Students should bring a current assignment, drafts of papers and reading materials related to the assignment to all sessions. The services offered by the Center are free to undergraduates. A Writer's Help line is available for students who are unable to come to the office.*

201 Tuttleman Learning Cntr.

Hours Vary

[www.temple.edu/writingctr](http://www.temple.edu/writingctr)

## **Ambler Campus**

Temple University Ambler is a full-service campus with a vast array of offices and programs to assist students in achieving educational success. These offices are housed together in West Hall, providing one central location for addressing all critical academic needs.

### **Academic Advising and Registration**

#### **West Hall (215) 283-1237**

*A dedicated, friendly staff of professional and faculty advisers help students develop a program of study that's best suited to their educational goals. Enjoy advisers who are knowledgeable in your field of study that can assist you with a career choice and help guide you through the course selection process. Temple University Ambler also offers full registration services to students. You can meet with an adviser, sign up for courses, and pay your bill entirely at Ambler.*

### **Career Services**

#### **West Hall**

#### **(215) 283-1273**

*Temple University Ambler's Career Services Center will discuss job search strategies, help you develop a résumé, and improve your interviewing skills. The center features career fairs, fairs highlighting various majors, a career library, on-campus job placement assistance and general career advising. The office maintains current directories of the business, education, and government sectors to help students find names, addresses, and positions of potential employers.*

### **Disability Resources and Services**

#### **109 West Hall**

#### **(215) 283-1237**

*In conjunction with Disability Resources and Services (Division of Student Affairs), accommodations for students with disabilities are provided at Temple University Ambler.*

### **Student Financial Services**

#### **West Hall**

#### **(215) 283-1403**

*The staff members at Ambler's Student Financial Services office are available to help traditional and adult students learn about loans, grants, work-study and other opportunities. The staff has all of the forms and paperwork needed as well as a complete list of application deadlines. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.*

### **Off-Campus Housing**

#### **Student Life Building**

#### **(215) 283-1425**

*Students in search of a place to live off-campus have a resource they can turn to for help. Each semester the Office of Student Life publishes a housing guide, which lists apartments and houses to rent or share.*



**Tutorial Services**  
**Bright Hall 204**  
**(215) 283-1347**

*Each semester, a schedule of free departmental tutoring is available as well as a registry for peer tutors. The Ambler Writing Center also has scheduled hours to help students with questions regarding grammar, usage, style, and other questions. The Center also provides tutoring in writing skills. In addition the Math and Sciences Resources Center also has scheduled hours to help students with questions.*

**University Bus Service**  
**Student Activities Office**  
**(215) 283-1277**

*During the fall and spring semesters, free bus service is available to Temple students commuting between various University campuses. Stops are made at Ambler, Tyler, Health Sciences and the Main Campus. Free shuttle bus service between Temple University Ambler and the SEPTA railroad station in Ambler Borough is also available. Cab service between the train station and the campus is available during Summer Session I and II for undergraduate students registered for courses at Ambler..*



## Learning Communities Planning Calendar

### *June*

- New Student Orientation begins—freshmen register for learning communities
- Learning Communities Faculty Workshop
- Teaching teams meet to compose community plans:  
**Planning lunches: June 20, 23**

### *July and August*

- Teaching teams meet to compose community plans:  
**Planning lunches: July 11, 14, 25, 28 or August 8, 22**
- New Student Orientation continues

### *September*

- **Submit community plan by September 9**
- Teaching assistants complete paperwork required to receive stipends.
- Organize a community-building activity so students can get to know each other and their teachers.
- Provide students with early and meaningful feedback on how they are doing

### *October*

- Administer the Learning Communities mid-semester course evaluation or conduct another assessment of the student experience
- Meet as a teaching team to review your community plan
- **Submit mid-semester community report by November 4**
- Planning begins for next Fall's learning communities offerings

### *November*

- Last meetings of the freshman seminar, *Learning for the New Century*
- Planning continues for next year's learning communities

### *December*

- Administer University course and teaching evaluation
- Final planning for next year's learning communities

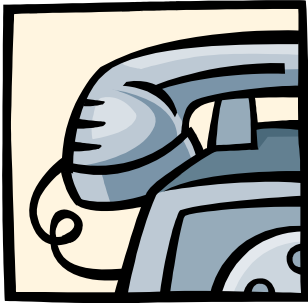
### *January*

- Participate in end-of-semester faculty focus groups
- Fall learning communities schedule due to the registrar

### *February, March, April and May*

- Departments assign Fall learning communities faculty
- Planning for summer faculty development

## Contact Information



### **Program Director**

Michele O'Connor  
Assistant Vice Provost for First-Year Programs  
and Transfer  
m.oconnor@temple.edu  
(215)204-5662  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conwell Hall

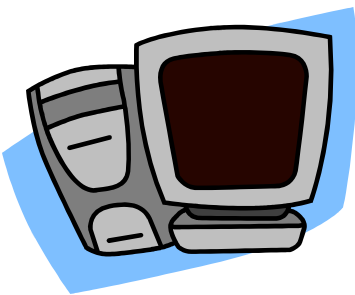
### **Academic Advising Liaison (summer 2005)**

*For registration or general advising questions:*  
Brian Foley  
Academic Adviser  
bfoley@temple.edu  
(215) 204-2506  
113 Curtis Hall

Visit the Learning  
Communities  
Website...

[www.temple.edu/lc](http://www.temple.edu/lc)

- Faculty Handbook
- Assessment Reports
- Learning  
Communities  
Bibliography



Use the **LCTeach Listserv**  
to correspond with other  
Learning Communities  
teachers. All faculty  
teaching in a fall learning  
community will automatically  
be subscribed to the list!

[lc teach@listserv.temple.edu](mailto:lc teach@listserv.temple.edu)