PROVOST TASK FORCE ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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December, 2011

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PROVOST TASK FORCE ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES

> Learning communities are small subgroups of students…characterized by a common sense of purpose…that can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness, and uniqueness that encourages continuity and integration of diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences. *Alexander Astin, Achieving Educational Excellence*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most impactful concepts in higher education today is that of learning communities. In recent years, various models of learning communities have emerged as curricular and co-curricular innovations to integrate different facets of the undergraduate experience to enrich the learning process and thereby promote student success in college. In short, learning communities give students the chance to deepen and diversify their education, connect with others who share their interests, and actively participate in their own educational experience.

At Old Dominion University, we have long recognized that learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom and our role in helping student to view learning as a lifelong process. Learning communities using the linked course model were offered at ODU beginning in the late 1990's and were housed in the colleges (including Advising Services, now called the Center for Major Exploration). Students registered for three courses and one of those courses was designated as the "lead" course. The colleges of Arts and Letters, Health Sciences and the Center for Major Exploration also offered an introductory course to their college or university life (AL 100, Health 100 and ELS 100 (renamed UNIV 100). The College of Health Sciences has continued to offer learning communities using the linked courses model. They are based on majors within the college and include an introductory course on the health professions. Recently, the model of living learning communities for first year students has been introduced in partnership with the Honors College, Health Sciences, and Engineering.

Although there are several models for learning communities and there is "no one size fits all." Learning communities, however, share some of the same basic characteristics. These include: offering a critical lens for examining the student experience, especially during the first year; encouraging integration of the curriculum; helping students establish academic and social support networks; provide students with a better understanding of college expectations; bring faculty together in more meaningful ways; focus faculty and students on learning outcomes; enhance connections, and support the transition to college. It is expected that our investment into learning communities will enhance student satisfaction with the undergraduate experience and contribute to student success and overall persistence and retention goals.

A learning community includes both faculty and students since both are engaged in the learning process. A learning community creates an academic and social community of learners who share ideas In short, "learning" and "community" can be seen as both <u>means</u> and <u>ends</u>: **Community** a*s a strategy to strengthen* **learning** and **learning** - *to work and to understand more deeply the value and the challenges of* **community**

The *Learning Communities Task Force* was established by Provost Carol Simpson and chaired by Carole Henry, Executive Director, Housing and Residence Life and Judy Luedtke, Director, New Student and Parent Programs. Membership is as follows:

<u>Membership</u>
Elizabeth Batu (Registrar)
Debbie Bauman (College of Health Sciences)
Nechell Bonds (Undergraduate Admissions)
Vicki Bonner (Student Engagement and Enrollment Services)
Kristi Burch (Housing and Residence Life)
Matilda Cox (College of Arts and Letters)
Carole Henry, Co-chair (Housing and Residence Life)
Kim Herbert (College of Sciences)
Todd Johnson (Auxiliary Services)
Alice Jones (Career Management Center)
Judy Luedtke, Co-Chair, (Director, New Student and Parent Programs)
Terri Mathews (College of Sciences)
David Metzger (Academic Enhancement and Honors College)
Bridget Nemeth (Campus Recreation)
Matt Oliver (English)
Worth Pickering/Tisha Parades (Institutional Research and Assessment)
Jennifer Usis (College of Business)
Sandy Waters (Academic Enhancement)

OVERVIEW OF CHARGE:

The task force was given the following charge:
- Develop a definition or concept for learning communities for ODU
- Identify what is needed to launch (or re-launch) a successful program;
- Identify successful practices in learning communities from other institutions;
- Make recommendations for resources and overall partnerships; and
- Provide other recommendations that are pertinent to the development and implementation of learning communities.

The committee's work in preparing the report was done in a number of steps and used external and internal resources. To gain a conceptual understanding of learning communities, all members received and reviewed a copy of the monograph, *Learning Communities: New Structures, New Partnerships for Learning* (Levine, National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition). The Task Force actually identified 10 well known colleges and universities with a variety of models for learning communities and programs to become more knowledgeable of the opportunities, resources needed, and to possibly further stimulate how ODU might expand these opportunities. Members shared their knowledge of the efforts that have been successful or abandoned at ODU (often due to the loss of a champion and/or resources). Committee members also received a variety of articles/materials and were referred to the website for the Washington Center Learning Communities National Resource Center (http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/directory_entry.asp#). A bibliography of materials and resources is included in the Appendix.

The task force put extensive thought into addressing the following: Why should we embrace learning communities? If so, what models would work? How do we make the first-year learning experience more seamless …where are in-class and out-of-class experiences mutually supportive? How can students take full advantage of *all* institutional resources for learning? What partnerships are needed to fully maximize existing campus resources? Included in the appendix of this report is a "Learning Communities Action Planning Guide" that identifies key questions and issues which would need to be thoughtfully considered as we move forward.

WHY SHOULD ODU EMBRACE LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

When we become more familiar with the various learning and performance outcomes achieved by several institutions, the reasoning for these initiatives and the investments made on the part of colleges and universities becomes fairly obvious. Quite frankly, there is a foundation built for success.

Last spring, about 2.1 million students at more than 750 colleges and universities participated in the survey which focuses on out-of-class learning experiences known as NSSE. The 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement Annual Report calls attention as to how student engagement results can inform the work of a variety of departments and offices on campus. The central message is that providing opportunities, activities, and environments supportive of learning and student success is a concern that should permeate the campus. In *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter*, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2010) found that a distinguishing feature of institutions whose students demonstrated an unusually high level of engagement was what they termed a *positive restlessness*—a pervasive sense of commitment to student learning and success spanning a wide range of campus agencies and offices.

In the Director's message of the 2007 NSSE report, George Kuh's, poses the question: "What is the one thing we should do to increase student engagement and success on our campus?" Kuh reports that "there is growing evidence that—when done well—a handful of selected programs and activities appear to engage participants at levels that boost their performance across a variety of educational activities and desired outcomes such as persistence. (Annual Report, 2007, p.7)

The "greatest impact" on student success "appears to stem from students' total level of campus engagement, particularly when academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements are mutually reinforcing…" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 647) The need to incorporate what students do—the "time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities"— is integral to any program focused on student success.

Kuh offers a list of six conditions that lead to effective educational practices including:
- activities that "demand students devote considerable amounts of time and effort to purposeful tasks,"
- activities that put students in circumstances that essentially demand they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters over extended periods of time"
- activities in which "students will experience diversity through contact with people who are different than themselves,"
- "opportunities for students to see how what they are learning works in different settings, on and off campus,"
- giving students frequent feedback about their performance in these activities.
- opportunities where students participate in service learning, conduct research with a faculty member, or complete an internship or other field experience, such as student experience. (Kuh, NSSE, pp. 7-8)

Kuh, citing the 2007 Association of American Colleges and Universities 2007 report, *College Learning for a New Global Century*, characterizes these education practices as "high impact" activities, and concludes:
> So, today when I am asked, "What one thing can we do to enhance student engagement and increase student success?" I have an answer. I say make it possible for every student to participate in *at least two high impact activities* during their undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one later related to their major field. *The obvious choices for the first year are first-year seminars, learning communities, and service learning.*(p.8)

NSSE has also reported that students, as a group, who participated in some form of learning community scored significantly higher on all five NSSE benchmarks:
- Level of Academic Challenge
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Faculty – Student Interaction

- Enriching Educational Experiences
- Supportive Campus Environments

Vincent Tinto's research on learning communities illustrates the impact of such communities on student learning and persistence. His research for the National Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment showed that students in learning communities:
- Formed their own self-supporting groups which extended beyond the classroom;
- Became more actively involved in classroom learning, even after class;
- Perceived themselves as having made significantly greater gains during the semester than did similar students in a comparison class
- Persisted at a substantially higher rate than did comparable students in the traditional curriculum; and
- Reported an increased sense of responsibility to participate in the learning experience, and an awareness of their responsibility for both their own learning and the learning of others.

Given the above research findings and results from other insitutions, the following represent desired outcomes for ODU students in learning communities:
- Make the campus psychologically smaller by creating peer reference groups;
- Developing or enhancing a sense of belonging at ODU;
- Providing an *integrated learning* experience for first-year students by connecting faculty, students; disciplines and co-curricular experiences in a purposeful, powerful, and coherent fashion;
- Increased first-to-second year retention;
- Improved performance (grades);
- Increased student social and academic engagement and increased student satisfaction (individual program summaries);
- Enhance achievement of stated learning outcomes;
- Demonstrate improved critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills;
- Demonstrate improved knowledge and skills related to career opportunities;
- Increase their knowledge about University resources;
- Demonstrate better understanding of differences and similarities among people;
- Experience a higher level of satisfaction;
- Persist at a greater rate as a result of the above outcomes;
- Provide a setting for students to be socialized to the expectations of ODU
- Bring faculty together in more meaningful ways; and
- Enhance student development as life-long learners, citizens and scholars

MODELS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The term "learning community" is used to describe a variety of structures for linking students and faculty. This foundation of a learning community often clusters students in classes where collaboration is encouraged and faculty coordinate topics and assignments. Beyond that, colleges and universities customize their learning communities to meet their unique student population. On one end of the spectrum may be more traditional approaches such as linked courses and the opposite end are those learning communities that involve faculty collaboration and cross disciplinary instruction. Although there are significant differences in how institutions implement learning communities, there are basically five major models.

Instruction in any of these models may be delivered by faculty or by faculty in concert with academic advisors, student peers, residence life staff, librarians, technology specialists and/or learning support specialists. In addition, all of these models may include inside-of-class (group projects) or outside of class activities (field trips, service learning opportunities, supplemental seminars) for student participants.

Paired or Linked Courses. This type of a learning community simply involves pairing two courses and listing them in a schedule of classes. Many times these courses are linked with a theme. Two faculty members teach individually but coordinate the syllabi and/or the assignments. Colleges and universities have linked an English Composition class, for example, with a course in public speaking and/or included themes. They may differ in the extent to which the faculty work together collaboratively.

Learning Clusters. This is an expanded version of the linked courses model. Clusters create a broader community by linking three or four courses. Faculty teach the clustered courses individually, but for the students this is a significant part of their course load for the semester. There are varying degrees in which faculty integrate their course material in the clustered classes.

Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs). This model links courses around a theme or major/career and is particularly valuable for large colleges and universities. FIGs are built around themes such as, "Pre-law", or "Pre-Health". In addition, FIGs can be a pre-packaged cluster of high demand freshman classes. At the University of Washington, these clusters also include a 2-credit University Community course (similar to ODU's UNIV 100). Faculty in team taught programs would have a high level of collaboration.

Freshman Seminars. These seminars take on many forms. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the FYS are "regular' courses in the sense that they that meet the general education requirement and are offered each semester. These courses go beyond the "regular" coursework because they help students explore a topic of potential interest that is new to them. The "Overview of Institutions with Learning Communities" contained in the Appendix include a variety of examples of specific seminars. FYS may also be one of a linked course in a learning community.

Living Learning Communities. The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) project defines living learning communities as *"programs that involve undergraduate students who live together in a discrete portion of a residence hall (or the entire hall) and participate in academic and/or extracurricular programming designed especially for them"* (National Study of Living-Learning Programs, Section I, Introduction).

LLCs often combine shared courses with shared living. For example, students are enrolled in linked courses and live together in a specified area of a residence hall. It is a more purposeful program designed to integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences and complement and extend classroom learning. The community is designed to promote interaction between faculty and residents; ultimately fostering intellectual and personal growth.

Living learning communities can be developed around themes, majors, or concepts. For example:
- broadly defined academic areas (e.g. Health Sciences)
- a specific major or majors (e.g. Performing Arts, Engineering, Entrepreneurship, or Foreign Languages)
- specific groups of students (e.g. Honors programs, open majors, transfer students, upper class students, first-year students)
- specific co-curricular interests (e.g. civic engagement or environmental concerns)

Federated Learning Communities. FLC is a cohort of students and has a "Master Learner" enrolled in three "federated", in-place courses. They also participate in a content-synthesizing seminar. The Master Learner is a faculty member from a different discipline who takes the courses along with the students and leads a program seminar. In this model:
- Students register for 2-4 courses, but they are not the only students in the course;
- Faculty do not coordinate topics or assignments; and
- Intellectual connections and community-building often take place in an additional seminar. Only the student cohort enrolls in the common seminar. This seminar may be led by upper class peer (common in the "FIG" communities), professional staff or a faculty member. The focus may help students develop study and problem solving and introduce them to campus resources.

One example from our review would be at University of Oregon where students enroll in 2 academic classes taught by faculty plus a seminar, "College Connections" which is taught by one of the instructors and a FIG peer academic assistant (FA). The faculty member and the FA collaborate on the design of the seminar which helps the students make connections.

<u>Coordinated Studies.</u> This is the most "seamless" of all the models and is characterized by a multidisciplinary program of study involving a cohort of students and faculty drawn from different disciplines. Faculty plan and participate in all parts of the program. Courses are integrated into a "block" around a central theme. Students take all of their courses together and may meet in large groups some of the time and smaller ones at other times. Faculty members teach only in one coordinated studies program, and students register for one program as their entire course load. Arizona State, for example, links general education courses around a theme. Combinations include a writing course that has been specially designed for the learning community program. Content, assignments are integrated; even grading may be integrated. Faculty in team taught programs generally have a high level of collaboration.

Another learning community which we did not seriously consider for ODU is a "Residential College." Three of the institutions that we looked at had a "Residential College." In the case of the University of Michigan, for example, the "RC" is under the College of Arts and Sciences and the RC is housed in a residential complex with a focus on creative writing and the arts. The complex has all of the facilities required for the program and the degree is jointly from the University and the RC. The complex has the faculty offices, RC director and administrative staff; University Housing staff, student beds, dining hall; black box theater; art gallery; photography lab; pottery equipment/kiln; studio; and library.

DEFINITION OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR ODU

After various meetings, consideration of the models, and a review of selected colleges and universities, the Task Force developed the following <u>definition of learning communities</u> in a day long capstone retreat:

> *"Restructuring of the students' time, academic path, and learning experiences*
> *to build community among students, between students and their teachers,*
> *among faculty members and among disciplines."*

BEST PRACTICES

Successful practices in learning community design and operations are inextricably tied to institutional culture. As mentioned earlier in this report, there is no one size fits all, and the following represent best practices from institutions with successful learning communities:

- **Institutions with successful learning communities design learning community models to fit the intended goals of their programs *as well as the structure and culture of the institution.*** Thus, learning communities can be residential as well as non-residential. Virtual learning communities are also an opportunity. It is important to be strategic and identify departments, schools and colleges interested in sponsoring learning communities (i.e. Business; Women in Engineering). In addition, institutional themes that support the overall culture (i.e. global engagement; community service, etc.) can lend themselves to learning community design. An institution with a majority of commuting students with many entering who were under-prepared designed a linked courses learning community program that integrated content across courses, helping students to make interdisciplinary connections. A linked first-year seminar taught by faculty, advisors, student peers and Learning Commons staff provided a one-stop-shopping approach to academic services for those students whose time on campus is limited.

- **Creating criteria for learning communities that meet program goals but also allow for flexibility in program design and operations.** There certainly needs to be criteria for developing learning communities, but that criteria should provide sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of the various, departments and targeted students. Instead of a template, there may be a set of learning outcomes, for example.

- **Strong, sustained central administration leadership is essential for achieving the intentional restructuring and faculty buy-in that are critical for creating successful learning community programs.**In most of our selected established programs, institutions have made implementation of learning communities a priority. For example, when one institution was creating its FIG program, a dean made it clear that departments who had received approval for new hires were expected to contribute faculty to the FIG program. And institutions with successful established practices have found a way to reward faculty through professional development funds, stipends, and teaching load credit or course buy-outs from the departments or some other means.

- **Academic buy-in.** When discussing the learning communities project with faculty, department chairs, and program directors, be sure to emphasize that the communities are pedagogically sound, and that the academic initiatives are designed to accomplish objectives such as elevating the intellectual climate of the campus; increasing levels of engagement; assisting in the transition to college' improving academic achievement; and increasing retention and persistence rates.

- **Strategic course linkages.** Faculty and deans are critical in determining the number of courses that should be blocked/linked for each community. Specifically, providing insight into the general education courses which are most appropriate. Various approaches include, utilizing a _primary linking course_ (i.e. English composition), or an FYE course.

- **Assessment is essential, and adequate sustained resources** are needed to carry it out. Assessment is critical for growing, marketing and improving the programs.

- **Develop a strong marketing campaign for learning communities.** Parents, students and members of the campus community (who may become key partners) may be unfamiliar with learning communities so it is important to educate the entire university community about their concept and value. A host of marketing approaches including web sites, brochures, letters to students, and the engagement of academic advisors, admissions counselors, Preview staff, and housing personnel are necessary to introduce and "sell" the learning community concept to students and parents. Some institutions target to parents as much as students, because parents understand the importance of the learning community concept whereas students are concerned that a learning community will feel more like high school than college.

- **Incorporate student peers into the learning communities supported by strong peer training programs.** Most of the universities that we reviewed all utilize student peers in their programs and note that it is critical to the program's success. It is not uncommon that students become peer leaders or mentors as sophomores and often continued through their junior and senior years. Programs that use peers generally receive _extensive_ training, often through a specially designed course. Peers can assist with a seminar, program in the living-learning communities, lead study sessions, and provide guidance to students going through the program. A sample position descrfiption for a peer mentor for both a Learning Community aswell as a Living Learning Community is included in the appendix to provide some food for thought.

- **Design out-of-class experiences**. Determine out-of-class experiences such as study groups and field trips that can be structured to intentionally support in-class learning objectives.

- **Implement a staffing infrastructure to support the program**. Staffing should be implemented which provides for overall coordination of the program. Determine how academic and student affairs share responsibility and accountability for the program. In some instances, there is a coordinator for both non-residential and residential programs with liaisons in each participating college.

- Technical support for learning community operations (e.g. batch registrations and housing assignments) is critical and should be in place *before* the program is implemented.

- **Advisory Board.** A "stakeholder group" is helpful to provide ongoing guidance and coordination to insure the success of the program. Group membership should be evaluated annually to also identify any areas where representation is needed.

- **Collaboration.** Extensive collaboration is key, and it takes a lot of work to sustain, and these efforts can deteriorate rapidly if it is not nurtured. Virtually every one of our targeted programs included extensive collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs and among faculty, staff and students. The registrar was cited as a critical player in creating systems that worked for batch registrations; collaboration between offices of admission and housing were critical for coordinating housing assignments for living-learning communities; and collaboration among faculty and various staff (e.g. academic advisors and colleges), and students were cited as critical for instruction and programming. This collaborative structure extends to the colleges, where learning community development and implementation involves faculty, staff and students as well.

- **Using learning communities to leverage institutional change.** Although not precisely a "critical factor," successful learning communities with their collaboration and successful practices, encourage successful practices throughout the institution. It is not uncommon that faculty report that it has significantly changed the way they teach their other classes.

ENGAGING FACULTY

Attracting and recruiting faculty is a first step when introducing learning communities. At the University of Maryland,for example, the dean of undergraduate studies brought together four college deans and asked them to nominate faculty to be a part of this new initiative. Working with deans and department chairs, four lead faculty were identified and given course release to participate in the planning, They were asked to forge new alliances while still keeping the learning communities linked to the colleges. Another approach is to form work groups organized around the critical tasks of curriculum, faculty development marketing, recruitment and evaluation. This is a great way to broaden campus involvement and support.

A commitment for developing and supporting those who teach is needed in order to create, improve and sustain learning communities. Appropriate rewards and recognition are essential in order to recruit and retain faculty. There are obvious tangible rewards including reductions in teaching load, monetary compensation, travel stipends, release time and research assistance. An important reward for teaching in a learning community should be credit towards faculty service. Collaboration between the university and the colleges is vital to a reward system. In some instances, colleges are asked to contribute monies for course release, GAs, etc., and the University then allocates funds for instructional grants to be used for curriculum development and guest speakers. Creative recognition can come in the form of lunches or dinners with the Provost or the respective learning community teams to share ideas and progress.

In the task force retreat, we identified occasional lunches, minimal dollars to participating faculty for program development, as well as a small stipend. Offering these opportunities to adjuncts were thought to really increase their engagement and overall commitment to Old Dominion University.

"*Sustaining and Improving Learning Communities*" discusses the need for faculty development funding for program development and necessary curricular planning, assessment , and marketng learning communities. An introduction to learning communities should include such topics as models and definitions of a LC, faculty expectations and discussions on teaching and learning. This portion of faculty development could focus on sharing information and getting ideas. Curricular planning and pedagogy moves to equipping faculty with the tools they need to be successful.

Discussions should center on how the courses will come together around the theme (or major). The conversations continue about course integration, intended outcomes and goals for the community. Assessment and reflection concentrates on creating direct and indirect evidence of student learning. Faculty development events can be workshops, retreats, and attending the learning communities' annual conference. Resources could include articles, handbooks, listserves, and websites.

It has been reported by institutions with learning communities that participating faculty will experience:
- Increased collaborations with students and other faculty
- Increased implementation of active and collaborative teaching and learning strategies
- Connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences
- Increased knowledge about students and their development
- Disciplinary and interdisciplinary collegiality
- Increased involvement in professional development activities
- Increased connections between LC work and their scholarship
- Increased knowledge about University resources
- Increased recognition and reward

ASSESSMENT

It is important to identify the assessment model and any outcomes when developing any given learning community. The committee looked for assessment models on various web sites and any discussions with contact persons with the institutions identified in the appendix. There are two national assessments (already mentioned in this report earlier) that all of our identified institutions participated. These are the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP).

According to its website,

> The National Survey of Student Engagement(NSSE) is designed to obtain, on an annual basis, information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results will provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. Survey items on *The National Survey of Student Engagement* represent empirically confirmed "good practices" in undergraduate education. That is, they reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college. (http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick_facts.cfm)

Institutions who participate in NSSE reported that they use the database of survey results to compare results for learning community participants and non-participants.

The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) web site provided the following description of its study:

> This is a multi-year study that examines how participation in living-learning programs fosters students' academic and social outcomes. In addition, the NSLLP includes a special focus on how living-learning programs may facilitate the success of women majoring in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM).

> The NSLLP provides a cohesive research program that examines living-learning programs using a consistent methodology. It provides participating institutions with credible, relevant, and useful information about the learning and development of their residential student populations. (http://ww+w.livelearnstudy.net/)

By incorporating learning community participation as a variable in our annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), we can determine the degree to which LC participants are more or less engaged than non-participants. This will allow ODU to compare results for learning community participants and non-participants.

In addition, an established assessment criteria will need to be established prior to initiating our learning community program. Minimally, grade point average (controlling for entering ability levels) retention, satisfaction and general education outcomes can be used. Both qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques would be utilized. A longitudinal study that tracks participants throughout their college careers can also be instituted.

Assessment areas which can be tracked/data tabulated include:
- Retention –first-to-second year retention for program participants, six year graduation rate
- Improved performance (grades)/ experience higher academic achievement?
  - Development of a sense of belonging at ODU
  - Increased curricular and co-curricular interactions
  - Achievement of stated learning outcomes
  - Demonstrated improved critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills
  - Demonstrated increased knowledge and skills related to career opportunities
  - Increased knowledge about U resources
  - Demonstrated increased understanding of differences and similarities among people
  - Achieved a higher level of satisfaction
  - Persistence at a greater rate as a result of the above outcomes

There are a variety of assessment strategies which can be used such as: Reflective journals, surveys, interviews, focus groups, internal/external review, case studies, participation in national surveys (NSSE, NSLLP, etc.)

It is also critical to do some initial assessment before implementing any learning community. The following are core components that could serve to guide this work:
1. Identify the intended learning outcomes of the learning community experience. It might be helpful to have a learning communities institute. Often it is helpful to provide some guidelines on developing learning outcomes. (Students will develop….Students will gain an understanding of….Students will be able to demonstrate…Students will be able to identify….Students will connect…)
2. Clarify how the intended outcomes of the learning community experience will help students reach the intended outcomes of the academic program.
3. Design learning community experiences to help students achieve the expected outcomes.
4. Identify a control group, if possible.
5. Determine how the outcomes will be assessed, and develop a realistic plan for collecting data from both learning community students and control students.
6. Collect background data on students (e.g., demographic information, learning styles) to find out who participates and how they respond. Gather feedback about the effectiveness of the intervention itself.
7. Monitor the long-term effectiveness of the learning community by collecting retention and GPA data for both learning community students and any control group.
8. Use the results. Hold a team meeting involving faculty, staff, per mentors on the learning community so they can learn of the results and consider future improvements.

A sample learning community survey (adapted from Iowa State University) is included in the Appendix and can be revised by any ODU learning community teams.

BUILDING ADMINISTRATIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND STRUCTURES

In order for learning communities to thrive, a student's experience must appear seamless. Academic Affairs, SEES, Administration and Finance must all play a role in bridging the cultures of the classroom and the greater campus community. LCs provide an opportunity for faculty and staff to come together as educators promoting student

success and development. They provide opportunities to share expertise and resources. At the University of Missouri-Columbia, student affairs leadership joined in partnership with the Colleges of Arts and Sciences to develop and implement a FIG community. They identified 8 strategies they used to build educational partnerships between faculty and staff:

- Identify a common purpose
- Engage in joint planning and implementation
- Link a variety of resources
- Coordinate in-and out-of-classroom learning experiences
- Define desired outcomes and develop assessment strategies to evaluate the impact of learning communities
- Think and act systemically
- Involve senior administrators

(Creating Learning Communities, page 117)

Identifying the players is critical to the success of learning communities. Commitment is essential from those who are ultimately responsible for enrollment, program, persistence, graduation rates and placement of graduates in jobs. In addition, deans and department chairs interested in recruiting and retaining their majors are important stakeholders in LCs. Partners include: University Registrar, Housing and Residence Life, Undergraduate Admissions, Enrollment Services, Center for Major Exploration, New Student and Parent Programs, academic advisors, Student Activities and Leadership, Educational Accessibility, Learning Commons and Academic Enhancement.

RESOURCES

While there are substantial challenges, there is enormous potential especially given the focus on the Strategic Plan of the University. The University is a "lean" institution in terms of personnel; it has proportionally (even taking into account our smaller enrollments) fewer faculty members and fewer staff members in its respective offices/positions than our peer institutions. It is unlikely that the development of a new learning community program with course linkages and outside-of-class activities can be accomplished without adding personnel and providing dedicated funds.

During the day long retreat, the Task Force identified compensation, whether in the form of released time, stipends, or some other means would be critical in securing faculty commitment to the learning communities. On a positive note, it appeared to fairly manageable such as a stipend of $500.00 for adjuncts, some programming funds, periodic lunch and learn discussions to continue to nurture and improve the learning communities.

There would need to be an outline of the project costs developed based upon the goals of the learning community program. There are also various categories of expenditures for us at this point:
- ✓ start up or one time costs;
- ✓ operating expenses that support the LC's and LLC's so that they have a sustainable infrastructure;
- ✓ funds for faculty development and a reward structure that would be considered, hopefully, an investment in teaching and learning.

As to the start up, it would be helpful to see if there is any available grant funding even if it was not immediately available. Start up costs range from workshops to offering faculty some stipends to develop LC's to marketing. There could be a call for proposals from the Provost Office, for example. Even with some partnering and reallocation of resources, additional monies will likely be needed for operating expenses related to space, staffing, computers, recruiting, assessment, printing outreach, etc. Lastly, the reward structure needs to be considered as recognizing ad valuing teaching. The discussion can also be framed in terms of retention.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop an overall philosophy for learning communities**, **what the university hopes to achieve including overall program goals**. For example, although it takes a lot of time to develop learn communities, what percentage, for example, of the entering class would we like eventually to have enrolled in a learning community? The task force received a copy of the Foundations of Excellence Executive Summary Report from 2007, and this group identified nine foundation dimensions intended to serve as a model for the first year experience. We could build on this work to develop a coherent University philosophy. As communicated in the report, the philosophy of the first year reads as follows:

  Old Dominion University is committed to a first year that utilizes student, faculty and staff interactions to promote personal growth, learning, and academic success among first year students. The first year experience facilitates a successful transition to college life within a challenging, yet supportive environment by fostering academic discipline, intellectual curiosity, personal and civic responsibility, ethical behavior, campus involvement, and respect for diversity. Through the development of relevant skills, knowledge, talent and goals, the first year lays the foundation for effective leadership in the campus, local, and global communities. Pg. 6

- **Utilize information from Appendix which provides a snapshot of various programs at respective** universities and make contact with selected programs which could be adaptable in some way to ODU.

- Have a **campus symposium or plenary session** at some point on learning communities to educate, create excitement, and promote these high impact learning activities.

- Complete **adequate planning** for each learning community as outlined in the report - Develop learning outcomes, application process, program, activities, etc.

- **Intensively design collaborations** between academic and student affairs (SEES) and **develop governance structures that represent all stakeholders**. It might be helpful to have a centralized structure or Committee for funding, policy development, approval of new LC's, a recognition program for peer advisors/mentors, and general administration. It should be very collaborative and encourage initiatives for LC's and LLC's. It could be allocating a pool of dollars for grants from the Provost. It may be beneficial to house the Learning Communities Program in the Office of the Provost through the Dean of Academic Enhancement to enhance visibility and signal the strength of the University's commitment.

- As the overall learning community program develops, institutions with successful programs create both a **Learning Communities Advisory Committee and a Living Learning Communities Advisory Committee.**

- There are a variety of models for **staffing** and we should consider at least two FTE's – one to support learning communities (linked courses/FYE/faculty recruitment/related planning) and one for living learning communities. (On a positive note a position was approved for the current year for the latter with joint funding from Housing and Residence Life and the University which focuses on campus housing academic initiatives including LLC's.).

- Develop a **peer advisor or mentor component** for each learning community. (Sample position descriptions are included in the appendix.)

- Develop an **adequate budget** which allows the learning community program to ramp up over the next few years. From the attached overview of institutions, there are some universities that do charge a supplemental fee especially for programming and additional support.

- **Build on current and developing programs** at ODU such as Freshmen Seminar Courses (UNIV 195), linked courses currently used in Health Sciences, living-learning communities at the University; and focus on environmental factors that could facilitate the development of a coherent learning community program. For example, link 2-3 classes in the living learning communities (General Education class, Academic Seminar, Supplemental out of class study groups; institute an academic support team for each one which includes advising, peer group study leaders, and program faculty/staff to support and assess progress.) LLCs will also foster social integration which is critical to student success and retention.

- Although some universities consider all residence halls as living learning communities, **strive to ensure that each living learning community (LLC) has an academic sponsor** which may be a College, a department or a group of departments. (This will facilitate faculty student interactions within the community.) Have each LLC have a shared or common academic component – at minimum, it could be a common course or a seminar, study groups, co-curricular events, or a combination of these.

- **Institute FIGS**
  - Expand University 100, one credit first year experience course which focuses on transition and connection to the University. It has a number of elements common to learning communities: Sections are small (capped at 22 students); Course content focuses on University expectations and how to meet them; cit an link with out of class activities to enhance community; foster relationships with faculty; and be used to target specific populations
  - Develop a learning community for transfer students. University 100 (spring semester offering) focuses on Transfers in Transition and is designed specifically for transfer students. In addition to overall transition to ODU, it can provide more focus on academic planning, selecting a major and career development activities. Generally, this program is not linked to other courses or living learning communities. Reviewing the few institutions that offer learning communities for entering transfer students including Iowa State University, University of Texas, and University of Washington would be very helpful.

- **Expand University 195, First-Year Seminars.** These are small (20 students) themed, faculty-taught classes for entering first-year students. These course allow first year students to experience faculty (including their Provost at ODU) in a small group experience, and the small size and content theme is designed to encourage community-building.

- **Evaluate the reward structure to encourage and secure the involvement of faculty.** In particular, engagement in learning communities could be considered as meeting any service requirement and consideration for promotion and tenure decisions. (Other suggestions are included in the document.)

- Identify and plan to ensure that there is **adequate technical support** for learning community operations (e.g. registration, course blocking/linkages, housing assignments). Almost every program director we interviewed emphasized the importance of having a registration system that can easily support linked courses registrations and living-learning assignments, particularly for programs that combine both.

- **Piloting 3 or 4 FIGs with incoming freshmen who select living learning communities during summer Previews based on their own interests.** These could include: Outdoor Adventure, Personal Fitness, Performing Arts, and Student Leadership. We recommend limiting FIGs to 19 or 20 students who could share a residence hall and agree to enroll in the same English 110C course. The English Department would select 3 or 4 English 110C instructors (adjuncts) to teach the courses connected to each respective FIG. We recommend an additional stipend of $500.00 to pilot the courses. Students enrolled in FIG English 110Cs would write about their learning community experiences and develop presentations for the Learning Community Committee about the benefits and challenges of their FIG experiences.

  Students would take advantage of university resources for each of these FIGs. For example, those interested in Outdoor Adventure can organize hiking, kayaking, or camping trips. Those interested in

personal fitness could schedule time to workout together in the SRC. Those interested in Performing Arts could attend and or audition for student performances on campus, and those interested in Student Leadership could work with the SGA (Student Government Association) or RHA (Residence Hall Association)to learn about student government responsibilities. Based on data provided by students, university resources, and faculty availability, we will expand the number of FIGs for the future. In the event of extremely popular FIGs, we can allow more students to participate, and dedicate multiple sections of English 110C for each FIG. This will afford students more scheduling flexibility without exceeding the 19 student cap for English 110C. Also, each year will culminate in student presentations/performances based on the FIG experiences. These events can be used to promote the Living Learning Community experience, and to improve the FYE for students each year. Dr. Hill, a professor in the Recreation and Tourism and Bridget Nemeth, are interested in collaborating to create an academic link between the wilderness orientation program, TENTS, and potentially one of the Recreation academic classes.

CONCLUSION

The University has a dominant and central theme of "student success" which President Broderick and members of the executive leadership team have been striving to permeate throughout our campus environment. Our goal is fairly simple in this regard - graduate every entering student from the University! To meet this goal, students need to make a successful transition to college. Key elements in the college experience that enhance first year student success include:

- Facilitating socialization into university life and culture
- Encouraging involvement in educationally purposeful activities in and out of class
- Promoting effective interaction with faculty and peers; and
- Assisting students in integrating diverse academic and campus experiences (Schroeder, 2010)

So what students do and how they are engaged during their ODU experience matters, is important to their learning, their success, and their persistence to graduation. It then logically follows that the University needs to create learning environments, experiences, and collaborations that help students achieve that ultimate goal. From our review of several Institutions that implement learning communities as well as annual findings of NSSE, learning communities are identified as high impact activities. Through their structure, program, goals and outcomes, the Provost Task Force concludes their development with appropriate support would have a considerable impact on student learning and development for ODU.

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LEARNING COMMUNITIES ACTION PLANNING GUIDE:

KEY QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO ADDRESS

BASIC CONCEPTS TO ADDRESS

1. How do you define a learning community? What is the main organizing construct (i.e. student engagement)? What research-based principles are essential in the design process?
2. What are the primary purposes, goals, objectives and desired outcomes of your LC`s?
3. What model (s) are most suitable for implementation? What is the optimal participant size and composition?
4. Who are the principal stakeholders that must be included in the design and implementation process? What are their primary roles and responsibilities?
5. What are the most appropriate administrative / management structures for implementing and coordinating the LC`s?
6. What are the primary characteristics and desired features of the LC`s?
7. What is a realistic timeline for creating and implementing LC`s?
8. What evaluation and assessment strategies are most appropriate for determining the efficacy of the learning community program?

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC ISSUES

The following are common, strategic issues that must be addressed early in the planning process:

1. **Purpose**. What are the primary purposes of learning communities? How will they contribute to student engagement, learning and success? Will they improve retention and graduation rates, grades, academic and social integration, satisfaction, etc? How will they contribute to enhancing undergraduate education? **Bottom-line**: *What would students miss if they did not participate in a learning community?* Key planning principal ---"*Begin with the end in mind*".

2. **Composition**. How many and what kinds of students will be involved in the first year of implementation? What subgroups of students are most likely to benefit than others…freshmen; lower ability / underprepared / high ability / Honors; students of color; residents / commuters; undeclared; those in academically rigorous, high risk (i.e. "killer ") courses; transfers, etc?

3. **Size**. What is the optimal size and mix (i.e. male / female) for various LC`s?

4. **Models / structures**. Will LC`s be structured around one (i.e. FIG) or more (i.e. Sponsored Learning Community / Living Learning Centers) models? Will the LC.s include residential as well as non-residential settings? Should technology be utilized to create "virtual learning communities"?

5. **Stakeholders**. What key stakeholders must be involved in the planning and implementation process…registrar; residence life; general education; associate dean(s); faculty development; admissions; orientation; learning center / academic support / early-alert staff; advising; Honors College; others? Who will appoint an ongoing "stakeholder group" that provides ongoing guidance and coordination to insure the success of the program?

6. **Focus / interest /themes**. Should the communities be structured around academic themes (i.e. Pre-Med; Pre-Nursing; Pre-Education; Women in Science; America's Diversity, Global Awareness, etc.)? Should the communities reflect academic interests of the freshmen class (i.e. high demand majors)? Are various departments, schools and colleges interested in "sponsoring" learning communities (i.e. The World of Business; Women in Engineering)? Are their important institutional themes (i.e. global engagement; community service, etc.) that lend themselves to learning community design?

7. **Courses**. How many courses should be blocked / linked for each community? Which general education courses are most appropriate? Are courses in high demand majors suitable as well? Based upon desired LC size, should one course be the *primary linking course* (i.e. English composition)? Should various "high risk courses" be included in some communities? Should FYE courses be included as part of the linked strategy?

8. **Faculty/ Academic Deans**. How much faculty involvement is desirable? Which faculty members are most supportive of learning communities? How can they be recruited / engaged in the design and implementation process? What range of involvement roles and responsibilities are appropriate for them? Should academic deans be advocates and champions for learning communities? If so, how?

9. **Academic expectations**. What academic expectations (i.e. effort; peer support; group studying, etc.) are appropriate for students participating in learning communities? How are these expectations communicated and by whom? Are there consistent messages that should be common to all communities? What role can "anticipatory socialization" play in establishing appropriate expectations for participating in learning communities? Are there duties and responsibilities that student assume when they are granted the privilege of joining a learning community?

10. **Out-of-class experiences**. What out-of-class experiences can be structured to intentionally support in-class learning objectives? Should study groups, field trips, collaborative learning, etc. be considered as "core experiences" for various communities …experiences that complement core curriculum objectives? Who should be responsible for coordinating out-of-class / co-curricular experiences?

11. **Coordination**. Who will be responsible for the overall coordination of the learning community initiative? Will responsibility and accountability be shared by both academic affairs and SEES (Student Engagement and Enrollment Services)? If so, who are those individuals and what roles and responsibilities, along with authority, must they assume?

12. **Peer advisors / community leaders**. Can current student staff positions be modified to focus on learning community coordination and support? What are the most desirable characteristics (skills, abilities, orientations) for peer advisors and how do they differ from resident assistants? How will peer assistants be recruited … selected … oriented … trained … supervised ... compensated … evaluated … recognized / rewarded? Who will develop the peer advisor job description? How will R.A. and P.A. roles and responsibilities be differentiated and reconciled … will compensation be similar? What will be the primary responsibilities of the peer advisors (P.A. `s) … academic agents who work primary on behalf of the faculty teaching the linked courses (knowing course learning objectives and outcomes; assisting student prepare for classes; coordinating evening study groups, etc.?

13. *Timelines*. Compile and overlap all calendars and schedules for relevant stakeholders / departments, including admissions and recruitment, advising and registration, orientation, planning and publication, residence hall contracting and assignment, etc. View selection to completion as a *process* that crosses multiple units, departments and even divisions. Key planning principle: *An organization is a relay team … the better the handoffs, the better the results.*

14. *Challenging logistical issues and concerns*. Who "owns" learning communities? What procedures must students follow to participate? Who is responsible for the signup process? What are the most appropriate application / assignment deadlines? How (and by whom) are learning community assignments made? When and how are students informed of their learning community assignment? If certain LC`s are not filled during pre-registration, can students signup during summer Preview? What happens if certain learning communities are undersubscribed …oversubscribed? How are advanced placement and pre-college credit accounted for in the assignment process? How are roommate requests and changes addressed? What happens if students drop one or more classes required in their learning community? What happens if students want a learning community in a residence hall that doesn't have the amenities they desire? Who is

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responsible for selecting the blocked and / or linked courses … the residence halls / floors … holding appropriate seats in selected courses…determining when those seats must be released, etc.? When students and parents have questions concerning LC`s, who do they contact for answers? Who communicates and in what venues - the elements, benefits and procedures associated with learning community affiliation … what roles are appropriate for admission recruiters, academic advisors, Preview/orientation staff…academic leaders, etc. ? Who is responsible for informing the broader institutional constituents about the purpose and importance of LC participation? What institutional agents or agencies are responsible for evaluating the efficacy of the LC program and communicating the results? What role should parents play in helping their sons and daughters consider the benefits of participation? Should LC`s include one or two semesters?

15. **Assessment / evaluation**. Establish assessment criteria prior to initiating the learning community program. Consider minimally using grade point average (controlling for entering ability levels) retention, satisfaction and general education outcomes. Utilize both qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques. Institute a longitudinal study, tracking participants throughout their college careers. In addition, incorporate learning community participation as a variable in annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) administrations to determine the degree to which LC participants are more or less engaged than non-participants. Finally, use data for ongoing performance improvement. Key planning principals: _What gets measured gets done_. And, _measurement without feedback is just data…feedback without measurement is just opinion._

Sample Peer Mentor Job Description (Course-based)

The peer mentor is a student staff member who provides leadership in the XXX Learning Community. Mentors assist in achieving the goals of the program which are (list program goals). XXX Learning Community is a Fall semester program. 25 first-year men and women from all majors in (your college) may participate. Each mentor will serve as a role model and will help (#) new students in making the transition to college life.

Qualifications:
For consideration, candidates must possess the following qualifications:
- Minimum grade point average of 3.0
- Juniors and seniors are preferred, but other qualified applicants will be considered
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of the major and college
- Positive attitude, Self-motivated
- Successful completion of (course they will be assisting with)
- Must be available to attend Peer Mentor training in August prior to school opening

Responsibilities:
Peer Mentors for XXX Learning Community will have the following responsibilities:
- Coordinate one social activity/team-building event per month for the program participants
- Maintain participant email list and provide information about the learning community to all members through this list
- Help students become familiar with university resources; advise and refer residents to appropriate university resources, as the need arises
- Attend (xx) class and facilitate study groups for the class
- Attend a weekly meeting with the learning community staff
- Maintain 2 office hours per week
- Assist learning community coordinator in planning field trips/site visits
- Meet individually with students once a month.
- Record observations and submit monthly reports to the coordinator
- Participate in service learning projects with the learning community
- Participate in training the week prior to the beginning of fall semester and throughout the semester as needed.

Compensation:
Possible aspects to consider:
- Flat Stipend
- Pay based on hourly work
- What is the hour / week commitment

Peer mentors receive a salary of ($XXX) and work 12 hours a week.

Application Process
Please complete the attached application and submit it by (date) to (coordinator) in (office). Submit two reference letters with the application. Following review of all applications, interviews will be scheduled (with all applicants? With those individuals whose applications pass the screening process?). Interviews will last one hour and will be scheduled during the week of (data).

Questions about the peer mentor position or the application process should be directed to:
- Names of Staff Member, Phone number, and Email address

Ideas for Creating Peer Mentor Job Descriptions

Qualifications
Listed below are possible qualifications for you to consider:
- G.P.A. - Is there a minimum G.P.A. that would be expected of a mentor candidate?
- Class standing - Do you have a preference for a sophomore, junior or senior?
- Courses completed - If there are any courses for which you want the mentor to be able to provide specific assistance/tutoring, you may consider listed that as a requirement
- Language requirements - For foreign language communities or international communities, this skill may be needed.
- Computer skills - Are there any required computer skills that the candidate would need to be successful?
- Previous residence life experience - Some programs prefer a live-in mentor who has lived in the halls already. Possible wording for this is: Applicants must have lived in the residence halls for at least (__) semester(s) to be considered for this position.
- Member of specific student organization - If there is an organization through the college or department that compliments the academic program, you may consider only students from that organization.
- Ability to work well with others
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of university resources
- Problem-solving skills
- Creative Thinking Skills

Responsibilities

The following are some general ideas for mentor responsibilities that should be specified to fit your program:
- Coordinate social out-of-class activities / events
- Conduct weekly meetings
- Coordinate team members e-mail list
- Help students become familiar with university resources
- Facilitate team-building activities
- Maintain an e-mail list to keep students informed of upcoming events
- Call / meet with students
- Implement study groups as needed
- Serve as a communication link between Learning Community coordinators, faculty and students
- Work with staff to facilitate learning experiences (classes / programs)
- Assist in the evaluation of the learning community
- Attend a weekly meeting with Learning Community
- Maintain consistent office hours

Sample Peer Mentor Job Description (Residential-based/LLC)

The peer mentor is a student staff member who provides leadership in the XXX Living Learning Community. Mentors assist in achieving the goals of the program which are (list program goals). XXX Living Learning Community is a Fall semester program. 25 first-year men and women from all majors in (your college) may participate. Each mentor will help (#) of these new students in making the transition to college life.

The peer mentor job is a live-in staff position, which requires that the mentor live on the same house as participants in the program. The Peer Mentor and the RA/CA are key staff members who work together to develop a community conducive to student success by encouraging positive behaviors and addressing behaviors that are detrimental to the individual and/or community. Like all residents, the Peer Mentor must support the Department of Residence policies and has a responsibility as a citizen/house member to challenge negative behaviors.

Qualifications:

For consideration, candidates must possess the following qualifications:

- Minimum grade point average of 3.0
- Juniors and seniors are preferred, but other qualified applicants will be considered
- Experience living in a residence hall setting
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of the major and college
- Self-motivation
- Must be available to attend Peer Mentor training in August prior to the beginning of school

Responsibilities:

Peer Mentors for XXX Living Learning Community will have the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate one social activity a month for the program participants.
- Maintain participant email list and provide information about the learning community to all members through this list.
- Help students become familiar with university resources; advise and refer residents to appropriate university resources, as the need arises.
- Attend (xx) class and facilitate study groups for the class.
- Attend a weekly meeting with the living learning community coordinator.
- Maintain 2 office hours per week. Post office hours outside your door and provide the information to participants via email.
- Meet individually with students once a month and submit monthly reports to the coordinator.
- Be available for formal and informal interaction with the students in the program.
- Attend periodic meetings with Learning Community and Residence Life staff.

Compensation

Peer mentors receive a stipend of ($XXX) and work 10 hours a week. Peer mentors are eligible to live in a single room, or they may choose to live in a double with a roommate. Demands on a peer mentor's time are many. After academics, the mentor position takes next priority; therefore, mentors are not to accept additional employment.

Application Process

Please complete the attached application and submit it by (date) to (coordinator) in (office). Submit two reference letters with the application. Following review of all applications, interviews will be scheduled (with all applicants? With those individuals whose applications pass the screening process?). Interviews will last one hour and will be scheduled during the week of (data).

Questions about the peer mentor position or the application process should be directed to:

- Names of Staff Member, Phone number, and Email address

Ideas for Creating Peer Mentor Job Descriptions:

Qualifications

Listed below are possible qualifications for you to consider:· G.P.A. - Is there a minimum G.P.A. that would be expected of a mentor candidate?

- Class standing - Do you have a preference for a sophomore, junior or senior?
- Courses completed - If there are any courses for which you want the mentor to be able to provide specific assistance/tutoring, you may consider listed that as a requirement.
- Language requirements - For foreign language communities or international communities, this skill may be needed.
- Computer skills - Are there any required computer skills that the candidate would need to be successful?
- Previous residence life experience - Some programs prefer a live-in mentor who has lived in the halls already. Possible wording for this is: Applicants must have lived in the residence halls for at least (__) semester(s) to be considered for this position.

- Member of specific student organization - If there is an organization through the college or department that compliments the academic program, you may consider only students from that organization.
- Ability to work well with others
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of university resources
- Problem-solving skills
- Creative Thinking Skills

Responsibilities
The following are some general ideas for mentor responsibilities that should be specified to fit your program:
- Coordinate social out-of-class activities / events
- Conduct weekly meetings
- Coordinate team members e-mail list
- Help students become familiar with university resources
- Facilitate team-building activities
- Maintain an e-mail list to keep students informed of upcoming events
- Call / meet with students
- Implement study groups as needed
- Serve as a communication link between Living Learning Community coordinator, faculty and students
- Work with staff to facilitate learning experiences (classes / programs)
- Assist in the evaluation of the learning community
- Attend a weekly meeting with Living Learning Community
- Maintain consistent office hours

Compensation
Possible aspects to consider:
- Flat Stipend
- Pay based on hourly work
- Room and board\
- What is the hour / week commitment
- Accept additional employment - Some programs do not allow mentors to work outside of the mentor job.

Adapted from Iowa State University

Learning Community Survey (SAMPLE)

<u>Common Core Questions</u>

Satisfaction with Learning Community
*Please indicate your **satisfaction** with your **learning community experience***
(Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Strongly Satisfied)
1. Overall satisfaction with your learning community experience.
2. Satisfaction with the social activities in your learning community.

Please answer the following question using the scale below.
(Strongly Discourage, Somewhat Discourage, Somewhat Encourage, Strongly Encourage)
3. Would you recommend joining a Learning Community to a friend or prospective student?

Open-ended
4. Please explain why you would or would not recommend joining a learning community?

University Experience
*My participation in a **learning community** has improved:*
(Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree)
1. my sense of belonging in the ODU community.
2. my opportunity to interact with ODU faculty and staff.
3. my sense of social support at ODU.
4. my interest in continuing my education at ODU.
5. my adjustment to academic challenges.
6. the quality of my overall experiences at Old Dominion University.
7. my connections to other clubs and university activities
8. my awareness of resources on-campus
9. my ability to get to know students who have similar interests
10. my opportunities to become more involved in community activities (volunteering, service learning, civic organizations)
11. my communication with professors
12. my participation in study groups
13. my ability to effectively and comfortably interact with people from other cultures or ethnic groups
14. my understanding of diverse cultures and values
15. my knowledge of issues and problems facing the world
16. my adjustment to academic challenges

Learning Experiences
*My involvement in a **learning community** has helped me to:*
(Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree)
1. see connections among my classes (e.g., learning in one class supported or expanded on what I learned in another class).
2. see connections between my personal experiences and class learning.
3. better understand the nature of my anticipated major.
4. apply what I learn in class to real world problems.
5. practice the skills I am learning or have learned.
6. find support for helping my learning
7. improve my study skills

8. become involved in service learning activities

Peer Mentor
(Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree)
1. Overall my peer mentor has been helpful.
2. My peer mentor provides me with useful information.
3. My peer mentor facilitates interactions among learning community participants.
4. I have regular interactions with my peer mentor.
5. My peer mentor encourages learning community participants to study together.
6. My peer mentor has kept me informed about upcoming learning community activities.
7. My peer mentor has helped me to learn about university resources
8. My peer mentor has helped me to succeed in my classes

Open-ended
9. In what ways has having a peer mentor been beneficial to you?
10. How could your peer mentor have better assisted you?

General Open-ended
1. Why did you choose to join a learning community?
2. What was the most satisfying aspect of your learning community?
3. What was the most disappointing aspect of your learning community?
4. Do you have any comments and suggestions for your learning community?