

Learning Community History

On November 8, 2006, Carolanne Brown, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Effectiveness, took a proposal to the Provost Administrative Council showing the previous involvement that Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBA) had in learning community groupings and proposed expanding that to major-specific learning communities for traditional freshmen in fall 2007. The hope was to have four groups in fall 2007; instead, the deans asked for a total of ten groups which served 158 freshmen (35% of the freshman class).

In fall 2012 we had almost 200 of our 445 freshmen in learning communities. With the planned addition of the exploratory (formerly known as “undecided or undeclared”) students, the total will be about 350 (70%) out of 500 freshmen. In fall 2012, we had 25 sections of First-Year Experience (FYE), ten of which were associated with a learning community. The total number of learning communities will grow in fall 2013 by approximately six groupings for the exploratory sections. Learning community faculty and staff meet at least once in fall semester to review what went well and what didn’t, what changed and what could change for the next fall. The new Peer-to-Peer mentoring program is showing success with the three learning communities it has been associated with in fall 2012.



From left to right: Nathan Maxwell, Dannemart Pierre, Carolanne Brown, Comfort Olugbuyi, and Craig Hanson.

Faculty and Staff Attend Summer Institute

In July 2013, a team of five PBA faculty and staff will attend the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities at Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. Dr. Craig Hanson, Associate Professor of Philosophy in the School of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Nathan Maxwell, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies in the School of Ministry, will represent the faculty. Dannemart Pierre, Assistant Director of the Student Success Center, and Comfort Olugbuyi, FYE Advisor, will represent Student Development. Carolanne Brown, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, is the team leader.

The team will have access to national leaders in learning community development and assessment and the final product will be a two-year action plan. All participants will be using the text, *Linked Courses for General Education and Integrative Learning: A Guide for Faculty and Administrators*.

2005-2012 Day Program Retention for New Freshman

		2013			
Group		FL	SP	FL	%
Fall 2012	New FT FR	655			
	FT FR in LC	198			
	FT FR not in LC	241			

		2011				2012			
Group		FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%
Fall 2011	New FT FR	476	425	899	225	69%			
	FT FR in LC	207	185	89%	246	73%			
	FT FR not in LC	269	240	89%	179	67%			

		2010				2011				2012			
Group		FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%
Fall 2010	New FT FR	445	409	82%	318	71%	291	65%	263	59%			
	FT FR in LC	252	235	93%	188	75%	175	69%	160	63%			
	FT FR not in LC	193	174	90%	130	67%	116	60%	103	53%			

		2009				2010				2011				2012			
Group		FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%	FL	SP	FL	%
Fall 2009	New FT FR	422	366	87%	270	64%	246	59%	213	51%	205	49%	198	50%			
	FT FR in LC	184	162	88%	121	66%	108	59%	98	53%	93	51%	80	49%			
	FT FR not in LC	238	204	86%	149	63%	140	59%	112	47%	107	45%	106	45%			

		2008				2009				2010				2011				4 yr 2012			
Group		FL	SP	FL	%	grad	FL	%													
Fall 2008	New FT FR	424	362	85%	294	69%	274	65%	246	58%	236	56%	226	53%	192	45%	42%	67	16%		
	FT FR in LC	194	169	87%	142	73%	133	69%	121	62%	117	60%	113	58%	96	49%	47%	37	19%		
	FT FR not in LC	230	193	84%	152	66%	141	61%	125	54%	119	52%	113	49%	96	42%	38%	30	13%		

“Learning communities refer to a variety of curricular approaches that intentionally link or cluster two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll a common cohort of students. They represent an intentional restructuring of students’ time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among student, faculty and disciplines. Many learning communities are also living and learning communities, restructuring the residential environment to build community and integrate academic work with out-of-class experiences.”*

*Smith, Barbara Leigh, et. al. *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. Page 20. Print.



What Are Learning Communities?

PBA's **learning communities** provide a perfect way for you to connect with other students who have similar academic interests. They also further the connection between you and your professors — and allow you to explore your proposed major much earlier in your PBA experience. Learning communities are curricular approaches that intentionally link two or more courses, usually around a particular interdisciplinary theme. You will enroll in a learning community along with a group of other students, called a "cohort." This experience: **builds community, enhances learning, and fosters connections among students, faculty, and disciplines.**

Major-Specific or Program Specific Learning Communities:

- Biology
- Frederick M. Supper Honors Program
- Lower-Division Nursing
- Medicinal Biological Chemistry and Pre-Pharmacy
- Psychology
- Rinker School of Business
- School of Ministry
- Teaching (Elementary Education, Secondary English, Math, K-12 Art or P.E.)

What Are Exploratory Learning Communities?

Exploratory Learning Communities Fall 2013:

- People Helping People
- My Own Boss
- The Write Way
- White Coats
- Globe Trotters
- Wherefore Art Thou?

Not everyone dreams of becoming a pediatric nurse, elementary art teacher, or college philosophy professor. Some have to try a number of majors before finding the one that fits. Still, others have so many interests it seems that they will never be able to decide. Once upon a time, these thoughts and feelings made choosing a major an overwhelming task. But not anymore! **Exploratory Learning Communities** at PBA allow you to **discover** your major by exploring various areas of study, all within the support of a community-building environment made up of students with similar interests.

So if the following statement describes you, "As long as I'm making my own hours, I'm happy," then you may want to consider the group titled, "My Own Boss." Meet other innovators like yourself. Explore opportunities you had not considered. Make lasting friendships with people of like goals. Or come to the startling realization that you need too much structure to make your own hours. Either way, you will be one step closer to discovering yourself.

(Right): Rachel Bartolotta, a member of the Cross-Cultural Interest Living and Learning Community in Fall 2011, was part of a Spring Break mission trip to Dominican Republic serving at Puertas de Sion Church and Amor & Vida School in the community of Los Ramirez.

Benefits of a Shared Assignment Across Classes

One innovation that can come from learning community class groupings is that of shared assignments. In several semesters, a biblical studies professor teaching Exploring the Bible, shared the same students as an English professor teaching Composition I. The students began a paper in Composition I, creating an outline and drafts. At the final draft stage, the paper was also submitted to the Exploring the Bible professor.

"My experience in the two classes we had done at that time was that the strong papers were as good as they always were but that we had lifted the weaker students who benefited directly. Stronger students benefited indirectly by not having to do two assignments. The joining of assignments makes tremendous sense," Dr. Preben Vang, Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies.

"I would say that from the Composition perspective, part of the value is that the students get to see how their learning in Composition immediately applies to their work in another course. They see the convenience of satisfying two assignments with one paper, but they also see the usefulness and relevance of college-level writing instruction and practice more generally," Dr. Jenifer Elmore, Associate Professor of English.



Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program

What Students Are Saying About Peer-to-Peer Mentoring:

- "I found the peer mentoring to be extremely helpful during the Chemistry course I took last semester. We would meet a couple times a week in the library to study and work on homework together as well as during recitation when they would be there to help if we had any questions. I was able to see the difference between my exam scores when I did and did not meet with the group, and they were far greater when I did. It would be nice to be given this opportunity again in the future to continue my success and better understanding of my courses."
- "Katherine was very helpful! She further explained concepts and helped with my confidence for testing. She also was flexible on meeting for times. I definitely found the program useful. I ended up achieving a high A in the course with her help."
- "Having this opportunity was very beneficial to my academic progress. I learned so much from the mentors and it was really nice knowing that when I needed some explanation someone was always there to help."



PBA Peer-to-Peer Mentors for 2012-2013: (front row, l-r) Alli Gerking, Alex Joyner, Katherine Harvey (second row, l-r) Mary Skruck, Julie Sandberg, Samantha Loutzenhiser, (third row, l-r) Susanna Nixon and Lindsay Turman.

2012 National Learning Community Survey – PBA Summary Results

My participation in this learning community helps me to develop my ability to:

Persist when faced with academically challenging work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	1	.9	.9	.9
Sometimes	13	11.3	11.3	12.2
Often	49	42.6	42.6	54.8
Very Often	52	45.2	45.2	100.0
Total	115	100.0	100.0	

Take responsibility for my own learning

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	1	.9	.9	.9
Sometimes	8	7.0	7.0	7.8
Often	40	34.8	34.8	42.6
Very Often	66	57.4	57.4	100.0
Total	115	100.0	100.0	

Connect my learning in school to problems and issues in my local community and the world

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Never	2	1.7	1.7	1.7
Sometimes	28	24.3	24.3	26.1
Often	49	42.6	42.6	68.7
Very Often	36	31.3	31.3	100.0
Total	115	100.0	100.0	

Bank of America Continues Support for Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program

A grant from Bank of America will help to expand a Palm Beach Atlantic University program aimed at freshmen that provides academic support services from students to students. In the fall of 2012, PBA received a \$7,500 grant from Bank of America for the project, which was named the Peer-to-Peer mentoring program.

Through the program, six mentoring students spent one hour per week in the classroom with faculty and students to gain a clear understanding of course content. Peer-to-Peer Mentors then spent another one to three hours per week organizing study groups with students in that class. Students taking advantage of these weekly opportunities said they found greater success in their biology, chemistry or algebra classes.

Bank of America has awarded PBA another \$7,500 for the program during 2013-14. "We plan to expand to more classes with more mentors in the fall and encourage even more freshmen to become more engaged in their learning," said Carolanne Brown, coordinator of the grant program and Assistant Vice President for PBA's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

"For many of these students, the entry course is vital to their success in a chosen major and we want to support them in building excellent study skills to reach their academic goals."

"Our youth plays an important role in our community's growth and Bank of America is committed to helping provide the resources they need to excel in their studies and pave their way to success," said Kelly Sobolewski, market manager for Bank of America. "By supporting this program, we aim to create opportunities for college students to realize their full academic potential."