Academic and Student Affairs: Fostering Student Success

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> *The term learning community, as we use it, refers to a variety of ways of intentionally redesigning the curriculum by clustering or linking two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enrolling a cohort of students.*

Over the past fifteen years learning communities have become widespread in higher education. Now found in all types of institutions, the number of colleges with learning communities is estimated to be more than five hundred and growing (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick 2005). These programs vary considerably in scope, stage of development, and design. They range from broad first-year initiatives that reach most freshmen within an institution to small pilot programs. The growth of the learning community movement can be attributed to an increasing body of evidence suggesting that learning communities can effectively address a variety of issues in higher education at many different types of colleges and universities.

Learning communities are frequently built around partnerships between academic and student affairs, creating a venue where faculty and student affairs educators can collaborate, coordinate, and ultimately create new common ground for learning. They provide an exceptional "laboratory" for the hard work of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. These programs often represent a move toward more holistic notions of student learning that take advantage of learning opportunities both in and out of class while forging new possibilities for students' and teachers' roles and relationships.

The purpose of this publication is to explore learning communities and their potential through the lens of student affairs. This introductory chapter provides an overview of both the context for and history of learning communities in higher education, and then shifts focus to the critical place in higher education occupied by student affairs. Common points of involvement by student affairs in learning communities are explored, and the most prevalent types of learning communities that demonstrate that involvement are described. The chapter concludes with

a summary of what is known about the benefits of learning communities for all participants: students, faculty and student affairs professionals.

Following this introduction, several articles delve more deeply into the value of these partnerships: Iowa State University's outstanding example of close collaboration between faculty and student affairs—present at the inception of its learning community initiative—is described, as are lessons learned over more than ten years of building and strengthening relationships at Temple University. The University of Missouri's effective use of peer mentors to enhance students' learning, supported jointly by student affairs staff and faculty, provides an excellent example of student affairs enlisting the input of faculty in ways that truly matter. The next three articles recount compelling stories of learning community programs that have responded effectively to some of higher education's most challenging populations: first generation students, non-traditional students, and distance-learning students. In each of these cases, student affairs professionals and faculty have kept their focus on the mission of their program—serving students at risk—and have been able to avoid the "turf battles" so often present in higher education.

Throughout the publication, other examples of programs at various institutions are cited in brief notes. Readers are encouraged to learn more about these programs from these institutions' websites. Additionally, information about many of these programs can be found in the Learning Communities National Resource Center Directory on the Washington Center website: www.evergreen.edu/washcenter.

The final article offers a step-by-step approach to the critical task of assessment in learning communities. Brower and Inkelas emphasize that assessment is the responsibility of both faculty and student affairs professionals. The best learning communities, like those profiled in this publication, are focused on learning. The staff and faculty are committed to student success and their efforts are measured and sustained by thoughtful assessment.

Student affairs professionals will gain from this text a better understanding of the role they can play in their institution's learning community initiatives. They may also find, in the models for collaborative initiatives that are described, opportunities for similar efforts at their own institutions. Learning community administrators less familiar with student affairs work should find this publication a useful introduction to the profession. Both student affairs professionals and learning community educators may find potential partners for the critical work they perform.

Context for Learning Communities

Learning communities address a number of pressing contemporary issues. Over the last half-century, U.S. colleges and universities have changed dramatically, raising a wealth of new opportunities as well as perplexing challenges. College attendance has become commonplace—a college education is now the minimal standard that a high school degree represented in the past. But student success has not kept pace with expanding access to higher education. Far fewer students graduate than enter, and there is increasing evidence that our colleges and universities are underachieving on several fronts (Bok 2006).

Ways of accessing higher education have also changed, creating new challenges for developing community and educational coherence. Students routinely move in and out of several institutions during their academic careers, necessitating new types of learning environments for this increasingly heterogeneous and mobile body of students. Current estimates suggest that more than half of all students attend two or more colleges before attaining their degree. And only 16% of the student population can be described as *traditional*—students between the ages of 18 and 22, attending college full-time, and living on campus (Marcy 2002). Many students attend college part-time, commute, and work; 41% are over the age of 25. Creating a sense of community, opportunities for sustained intellectual engagement, and educational coherence are far different tasks than they were in the "old days" when residential colleges were the norm.

Funding constraints, and an environment in which institutions are being asked to do more with less, also create challenges to student success. At the same time, the message from accrediting bodies and state and federal education authorities is that we must become more effective and efficient at educating diverse students, and we must also demonstrate high levels of institutional performance. Getting better at promoting and documenting student learning has become a priority, yet this remains a difficult task. Almost all institutions, from elite private liberal arts colleges to large research universities to open-access community colleges, are scrambling to keep up with the implications of these changes.

This combination of challenges is forcing higher education to recognize that we are, in many ways, a house divided: divided between academic and student affairs, divided between teaching and research, divided between academic discipline-based specialized study and the need to provide broader preparation for life-long learning. Organizational

complexities have further complicated the equation, requiring deeper forms of collaboration between high schools and colleges and between two- and four-year institutions.

The good news is that there is now a considerable body of research describing how colleges can intentionally create conditions to promote student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Tagg 2003; Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999; Astin 1993; Tinto 1993; Massy 2003). All of this work has raised questions about whether existing organizational structures and ways of operating help or hinder student learning.

The learning community movement represents one large-scale effort to rethink our organizational structures including the way we structure the curriculum. The intentional restructuring that happens in learning communities creates the opportunity for dramatically redesigning the time and space for learning.

For most students, their encounters with learning and with the educators charged with that learning have taken place in two distinct venues: in the classroom, the location of formal learning, and outside the classroom, the location of just about everything else. Student affairs educators have known for much of this era that the learning taking place outside the classroom profoundly influences not only performance in the classroom, but much of the cognitive, emotional, and social growth students experience during their years in higher education (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991).

With an increasing number of students commuting, students' off-campus experiences play an even larger part in their day-to-day learning lives. Questions for academic affairs and student affairs professionals to consider include: How can the wider external communities in which students participate become a resource for their on-campus learning? Since commuter students spend far less time on campus, how can we create the peer relationships and sense of community that are so vital to the educational experience? Not surprisingly, learning communities—an innovation that started nearly seventy-five years ago—are providing a valuable solution to these contemporary issues.

Historical Backdrop—Back to the Future

The learning community movement in U.S. higher education has its roots in the experimental programs created by reformers like Alexander Meiklejohn and John Dewey. Meiklejohn's Experimental College, established at the University of Wisconsin in 1927, was a response to

the increasingly fragmented, depersonalized and fractious directions universities were beginning to take in the early part of the 20th century (for a detailed history see Smith, et al. 2004). Meiklejohn predicted that the increasing ascendancy of research and disciplinary specialization would undermine teaching and educational coherence and lead to the neglect of the classical function of providing education for citizenship in America's colleges and universities. In his words, the "college" would be eclipsed by the "university."

A smaller innovation, first-year seminars, also arose at this time as universities struggled with issues around socializing a more diverse student body and making the residential environment reinforce rather than distract from the academic experience (for a history of early first-year seminars, see Henscheid 2004; Gordon 1989). Meiklejohn knew of these efforts, but thought they were too small an intervention to make a significant difference.

Through the Experimental College, Meiklejohn sought an educational experience that brought students and faculty into close, meaningful contact with one another around a living-learning community and a coherent curriculum that connected ideas, rather than parsing them out into disparate departments. His curriculum focused on democracy and was intended to prepare students for civic engagement. The residential experience was a key and intentional aspect of this living-learning community.

The Experimental College was short-lived (1927-32), but became the inspiration for a number of later educational reforms including the contemporary learning community movement. A number of key ideas drove these efforts: (1) that the best learning takes place in the context of community; (2) that knowledge is best approached from multiple vantage points with integration of those perspectives considered as vital as the perspectives themselves; (3) that active learning and personal engagement are critical aspects of the learning process itself; (4) that structures, such as courses and discipline-based departments, are critical in shaping our work and our relationships; and (5) that the *learning experience* consists of the formal classes and relationships between faculty and students as well as the out-of-class experiences where students learn the habits of mind, and the responsibilities and challenges of working with others.

Meiklejohn and his successors believed that educational structures and relationships could be reinvented to better promote student learning around a more holistic concept of how students learn and educational communities are built. His short-lived venture, which dissolved as

America struggled with the Great Depression, still stands as a model that can be emulated today.

In the 1960s and 70s, with the expansion of the higher education system, there was a resurgence of interest in educational innovation. Community colleges became increasingly important, and a variety of innovative colleges were developed within existing four-year institutions or as new, freestanding institutions. The student population also changed dramatically, becoming more diverse, with more students attending college part-time and commuting. Creating community became more of a challenge when so many students had such busy lives outside the classroom.

Learning communities re-emerged at this time with early experiments at the University of California-Berkeley, San Jose College, The Evergreen State College, SUNY-Stony Brook, and LaGuardia Community College. These early experiments came to the attention of the National Institute of Learning group. This group wrote the influential study *Involvement in Learning* (1984) which recommended that all institutions adopt learning communities as a means of strengthening community, fostering student engagement, and promoting curricular coherence. Over the next twenty years, numerous institutions—private and public, two-year and four-year—did just that. By 2005, more than 500 colleges and universities had adopted learning communities, and the reform effort had become a growing movement. (For detailed information on learning communities in research universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges, see O'Connor, with others 2003; Spear, with others 2003; Fogarty and Dunlap 2003). At the same time, shifting views about the organization of universities began to create fertile ground for new collaborations.

Shifting Paradigms about the Role of Student Affairs

In recent years, a number of scholars—including Peter Ewell, Alan Guskin and Mary Marcy (2001, 2003); Guskin, Marcy, and Smith (2003); Carol Twigg (2003); William Massy (2003); and John Tagg (2003)—have argued that we need fundamental reforms in the way colleges are structured to support student learning. As Peter Ewell (2002) observes in his essay "Three Dialectics about Higher Education's Future," the academy faces a number of paradoxes that require transformative thinking if they are to be resolved, not the least of which is the need to better educate an increasingly diverse and expanding student body with fewer resources. Other paradoxes include the need to provide

educational coherence in a time when more and more students attend more than one college, and the need to create organizational structures that better support cross-unit functions such as general education and interdisciplinary studies. Many other critics point to the need to recognize the learning that takes place outside the classroom (Bok 2006). They also argue that we need to take better advantage of under-utilized talent outside the full-time faculty; increasing collaboration across the institution is part of the solution. We are currently in a period of flux with wide-ranging debates about ways to organize institutions to better foster and support student learning (Ewell 1997).

Throughout these discussions and debates, student affairs has experienced its own shifts in structure and purpose. Efforts to respond to evolving institutional priorities, rapid and profound changes in student demographics, and an increasing number of calls for institutional accountability have all served to keep student affairs professionals from becoming complacent in their mission or role on campus.

The learning community movement emerged at a propitious time, reinforcing shifting notions about the role of student affairs in today's colleges and universities. In fact, learning communities can be viewed as a place where two historical streams intersect: one within the scholarship of classroom learning, and one within student affairs. Both are searching for coherent and holistic ways of approaching students and student learning as higher education becomes more large-scale, professionalized, and specialized.

The learning community movement is coincident with shifting philosophies and ways of organizing student affairs. According to Blimling (2001), several paradigm shifts in student affairs have taken place in the past fifty years. These range from a service-oriented approach, with student affairs providing services to students and faculty in what is essentially an auxiliary services model, to a perspective that embraces a full partnership with faculty as professionals focused on student learning. These paradigms have not followed one another in orderly fashion, and indeed, each still exists on campuses across the landscape of higher education.

Blimling describes the *student services* and *student administration* paradigms of student affairs as having their roots in the student consumerism movement of the early 1980s. Their philosophies place student affairs functional areas at the level of auxiliary services: existing for the convenience and service of students, and subordinate to the work of the faculty. These approaches focus on creating smooth, efficient, and sensible systems, transparent and easy to navigate, so that the real

work of the academy—classroom learning and research—can take place with a minimum of hassle. Programs and services are framed around the question: What is the most efficient way to move students from Point A (application for admission) to Point B (graduation)? The information and student services "commons" approach is one contemporary version of an attempt to organizationally provide more integrated one-stop services for students.

The creation of a "canon" of literature about the development of students (primarily, and notably, traditional-aged) brought about the creation of another quite different paradigm within student affairs, the *student development* paradigm. What the research told us about the predictable patterns of students' psychosocial, moral, and cognitive growth provided frameworks for the creation of programs, initiatives, and services, all designed to enhance, or at least respond to, these patterns. Programs and services are framed by this question: What is the developmental outcome of this effort? Typical examples include freshman residence halls and special programming for new students, wellness programs, recreation opportunities, multiculturally-oriented services, and leadership classes and programs.

The paradigm shifted again when increased calls for accountability in higher education throughout the financially challenging 1980s and 90s led to a number of changes on campuses across America. Tuition and fees were exceeding students' ability to pay, and increases in federal and state-sponsored financial aid led to increased scrutiny of higher education spending. Student affairs, a profession that had seen rapid growth in the previous decades, received its own share of scrutiny, prompting a careful re-examination of its purpose on campus. Documents published by the profession's major associations led to yet another paradigm shift, one that ironically echoed the profession's earliest principles: *student learning*. The educational experience of students, these documents stated clearly, could not and should not be divided into the two accepted venues of inside and outside the classroom. Student affairs, as a profession, should bear a significant portion of the responsibility for student learning, and should partner with faculty to maximize learning opportunities for students.

Forms of Student Affairs Involvement in Learning Communities

Learning communities have become a productive arena for faculty and student affairs professionals to combine their efforts as educators. The resulting collaborations can provide students with the best environment

for learning in a variety of different ways. In planning and evaluating their partnerships in learning communities, it may be useful for student affairs professionals and faculty to consider the different types of roles student affairs staff can play. Individual learning community programs or an overall learning community effort at an institution can be mapped using these categories. As the table on the following page illustrates, there are many options for involving student affairs professionals in learning communities.

Each institution defines "student affairs" and its functions in a unique way. This table lists some possible functional areas that may support learning communities. Although it is not an all-inclusive list, it should encourage learning community planners on any campus to think broadly in terms of potential student affairs partners.

The simplest and most common form of involvement centers on providing administrative support and assisting with the planning and delivery of learning communities. Critical support functions include student recruitment, marketing, scheduling, placement and advising, transcripting, and registration. Learning communities often require the invention of new ways of doing business, the adaptation of existing processes, or both. The larger the learning community effort, the more changes are typically required. Many learning communities initially struggle with logistics and technical issues associated with recruitment and registration; over time they learn how to tailor their student information systems to new course registration patterns. Scheduling can also make or break a learning community program. While all of these technical problems can appear, at first, to be insurmountable, they can be solved. A program's future success depends upon solving these challenges. Student affairs needs to be a stalwart and knowledgeable partner in providing administrative support for the learning community effort to be successful. Cross-unit advisory committees are often formed to deal with these implementation issues.

Student affairs is often involved in learning communities through the "co-curriculum." There may be no co-curricular expectations within the learning community, or something very simple may be included, such as group attendance at one campus event each semester. Further along the continuum, one can imagine expectations of involvement in campus organizations and activities as a requirement of participation, group community service projects, travel as a group or in small groups with faculty, ongoing career counseling provided specifically for learning community members, tutoring, and other services typically provided by student affairs staff.

Student Affairs Involvement in Learning Communities (LCs)

Functional Role	Low Intensity	Moderate Intensity	High Intensity
Administrative support	Basic services, including block registration	Increased services, adjustment of policies to accommodate LCs	Restructuring registrar functions around LCs
Co-curricular	Student attendence at one or two events during a semester, membership in related student organizations	Higher expectations for outside-of-class attendance at events, regular activities, community service, etc.	Fully-integrated co-curricular activities, perhaps required for assignments; overnight retreats; etc.
Residential (not part of all LCs)	Students scattered throughout building, minimal use of residential proximity	Students living on same floor, but mixed with non-LC members, one or more classes taught in residence hall	Residential space dedicated to LC, student and professional staff involved in LC activities or classes, faculty offices in building, etc.

Note: Other examples of student affairs-related services include specialized tutoring, health and wellness activities, recreation and outdoor programming, related career development services, study abroad advising and re-entry support, specialized orientation sessions, and alumni involvement.

It would surprise many people to learn some of the ways student affairs professionals have supported the curriculum of learning communities, given the assumption that curriculum is the sole purview of the faculty. Student affairs professionals are often active classroom instructors, teaching content-based courses, integrative seminars, first-year seminars and capstone experience classes. Again, the level of involvement can range from low (teaching a single class or a one-credit integrative seminar) to high (being a fully-involved partner in a team-taught course).

In the last fifteen years interest in connecting residence life with student learning has blossomed. Many learning communities have been developed in this arena as institutions move away from the hands-off philosophy of *in loco parentis*. As one university president put it, "Without any educational programming, we are simply running a real estate operation in our residence halls." Like many other leaders, he decided it was time to create intentional learning communities in all venues.

Residential learning communities vary considerably. They could be a group of students taking one or more classes who live in the same residence hall, though they may be scattered throughout the hall. There may be little or no organizational effort made to maximize the benefits of students' proximity to one another, but they may find it easier to study together or do group projects in the class. Further along the continuum, one might find a learning community's students all living on the same floor, interspersed with students who are not enrolled in the learning community. (This was the pattern at Meiklejohn's Experimental College because they did not have a sufficient number of students to occupy the entire facility. Unfortunately, the special rules and programs the Experimental College students enjoyed created an undesirable sense of exclusion and competition with the other students.) Faculty might choose to meet in the residence hall for tutorials, or a lounge might be designated as a classroom. A learning community that employs a student staff member working for residence life who is knowledgeable about the learning community (perhaps an alumnus) would be a higher intensity application. Having all of the students on a floor or in a hall be members of the learning community, with faculty offices, classrooms, peer advisors and specially-selected residence life staff members on-site would move a learning community to the highest-intensity end of the continuum. Since a residential component to a learning community is not always deemed feasible or necessary, the continuum for residential intensity can go from "no intensity" (non-residential programs) to "high intensity."

Many learning communities involve student affairs professionals in ways that go beyond providing administrative support or co-curricular functions. Retention programs, for example, are usually vested in student affairs, and many learning communities are initiated to address concerns about retention, which is a significant issue in many institutions. A large number of learning communities also focus on special populations. Many learning community efforts are funded through federal Department of Education programs such as Title III (serving first generation and low-income students) and Title V (serving Hispanic students). Tutoring and various forms of supplemental instruction are often part of these efforts. These services and programs usually represent a convergence of the administrative support, co-curricular, and curricular functions of student affairs, In some cases, they may also include a residential component.

> ***The Goodrich Program (University of Nebraska-Omaha)***
> *This highly successful program, aimed at low-income students, provides financial aid, integrated advising, and other support services. Some of the students' general education courses are also included in the program.*

The roles student affairs professionals play depends upon where a learning community is on each continuum. A student affairs professional might be directly involved in the curriculum by being a member of the teaching team, or he or she may serve in a core connector or caseworker role as used at The Evergreen State College and Johnson C. Smith University respectively. Student affairs staff might provide tutoring and other support services, or organize various elements of the living-learning community. St. Lawrence University is an example of a high intensity learning community where the academic program is situated in the residence halls, with academic and student affairs collaborating in numerous ways. Among community colleges, LaGuardia Community College is an innovative institution now offering "learning community academies" for all students. As a later article in this publication indicates, these academies involve strong partnerships between student affairs professionals and faculty.

This continuum model provides a way to think about the multiple dimensions of a learning community, dimensions that involve both faculty and student affairs staff. Each learning community, planned or extant, can be "plotted" along these continua. This can be a descriptive exercise to map current learning communities, or a prescriptive exercise

in planning or re-organizing. There is no one place on any of these continua that is the ideal. How student affairs is integrated depends on a multitude of factors that affect the planning and operation of a learning community—the culture of the institution, the history and present state of collaboration between academic and student affairs, the available resources, and where they come from. But this continuum model can encourage thoughtful conversation as those responsible for the learning community come together to maximize its potential as a learning environment.

This conception suggests a number of propositions. First, the continua are not mutually exclusive. Together the continua describe the enormous flexibility that characterizes modern learning communities. They can enhance each other, complement one another, or both. Strong learning communities may actually redraw the boundaries of the categories. For instance, the traditional division between curricular and co-curricular functions—or residential activities, classroom activities, and community-building—may be reconfigured to create a more holistic learning environment. (A number of strong living-learning communities, like the one at St. Lawrence, do just this.) Second, a strong learning community effort typically has a mix of trajectories across the chart and maximizes the strengths of faculty and administrators who bring varied skills and levels of interest to the effort. Third, learning communities that are low on all dimensions are not maximizing the learning potential. Fourth, commitment to the curriculum needs to be evident on all continua for a genuine learning community to function. The curricular dimension is in this sense fundamental.

The more "intense" a learning community is, the more complex its administration. Getting students into classes, into rooms, into vans for travel, and into regular conversations with resource people can thoroughly tax an institution's administrative infrastructure—and all the individuals who make it work. The more intense, or complex, a learning community is, the more collaboration it requires between the registrar, deans and department chairs, student affairs directors, residence life staff, and business staff (especially if a learning community has required fees). While institutions' capacities for collaboration vary, close associations between these functional areas should be a goal of any institution. One of the many benefits of learning communities is that they tend to build cooperation between previously unconnected constituents. Out of that collaboration, relationships develop that strengthen the institution well beyond the learning communities program.

Common Arenas and Typical Forms of Learning Communities

In the following sections we discuss in more detail some of the typical venues for involving student affairs in learning communities.

First-Year Initiatives

An overwhelming number of learning communities are first-year initiatives designed to help students make the transition to college and to improve student retention. This focus on the first year is understandable since attrition rates in most colleges and universities are particularly high in students' first year. Learning communities built around first-year seminars have become ubiquitous, especially in research universities.

Variously called "freshman seminars," "first-year seminars," or "University 101" classes, these courses differ in their staffing and emphases. Some orient new students to college resources, study skills, time management, and other fundamental strategies for academic success; others provide a stimulating introductory experience to learning in a discipline or are built around an interdisciplinary theme. The most common form of seminar focuses on college transition. In a study of different types of seminars (Swing 2002), this type of seminar was rated highest in terms of ten major learning outcomes, ranging from academic outcomes such as critical thinking to college experience-oriented learning outcomes such as time management and connections with faculty. Debates continue about what the course content should be for first-year seminars, who should teach them, whether freshman seminars should be credit-bearing, whether student peer tutors should be involved, how training should be structured, and how to bridge the divide between student and academic affairs (Gordon 1989). At most institutions, these seminars are elective, credit-bearing courses (usually offering one credit). About half are taught in the pass-fail mode. Academic advisors, other student affairs professionals, or upper-level students usually teach these courses. Students who participate in these seminars often report greater satisfaction, more contact with faculty, stronger feelings of success in adjusting to college, and gains in self-rated skills and abilities compared to their peers (HERI 2001).

Freshman and first-year seminars are often offered as stand-alone courses, but an increasing number are organized as learning communities where a first-year seminar is joined with at least one other course. Recent research suggests that first-year seminars are more powerful if they are linked to other courses as part of a learning community that includes community-building, student engagement and interaction, and

curricular connections (Henscheid 2004). Freshman Interest Groups are one common form of learning community that combines two or three courses with a first-term seminar. Usually, the associated courses are not modified in any way and are taught to a mix of learning community and non-learning community students. The subset group of students enrolled in all the courses together—the learning community—also takes a seminar. The seminar is the site of community-building and curricular integration. The amount of credit these seminars carry varies from zero to four credits. Whether the amount of credit attached to a seminar influences their impact has not yet been studied.

> ### *Freshman Interest Groups*
> *Invented at the University of Oregon, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) are now common at many universities. Large programs cluster general education courses around themes such as "Human Nature" or "Inventing America" or pre-major interests such as Pre-Med, Pre-Law or Pre-Health. This provides students with a coherent way of choosing among many general education course options.*

Honors-Based Learning Communities
Institutions that want to provide an enriched academic environment for their most talented students sometimes create learning communities (residential or not) geared toward high-ability students. Proponents of such learning communities see value in the peer relationships these students have, as well as the increased opportunity to interact with faculty, who may find it a privilege to teach these accomplished students. While any learning community can offer a strong co-curricular component, these learning communities often have access to resources that make particularly attractive opportunities possible, such as paid internships, field trips, and access to alumni who can help with career options. Honors-based learning communities have the added advantage of helping to recruit talented students to an institution.

Living-Learning Communities
Interest in living-learning communities has been growing with many creative programs linked to residence life. "Theme housing" has existed on campuses for decades as administrators (and, occasionally, students) have sought to create communities around common interests. These are important efforts, with the potential to have significant impact on retention and other measures. But learning communities are, by

definition, curricular; to be considered a residential learning community, there must be a classroom connection. This may range from students enrolled in a specific class who also live in a common residence hall to a fully-integrated residential college that has at its core a coordinated curriculum. Many living-learning communities evolve over time, often starting modestly with a largely non-curricular focus and later developing strong connections to students' academic pursuits.

Advocates for Children (University of Maryland)

This learning community enrolls seventy to ninety students, who live together in a residence hall. They take required classes, including a three-credit course called "Issues in Child Advocacy," a three-credit course in human diversity, a one-credit freshman colloquium, and a two-credit individually-designed course that allows them to pursue the study of child advocacy through a variety of disciplinary approaches.

Watauga College (Appalachian State University)

Watauga College is an example of a learning community college of 120 freshmen situated within a larger college. Students live together in a hall that includes classrooms and is adjacent to faculty offices and a dining room. They fulfill the University's requirements for freshmen in English and history through Watauga courses. Courses are team-taught or linked. Students and faculty eat lunch together and participate in a variety of common activities including lectures, field trips, service projects, and cookouts.

Community Scholars Program (University of Michigan)

This residential learning community enrolls about 175 students interested in social justice and diversity issues. Service learning is incorporated into the curriculum through three required courses: a first-year seminar focusing on community issues taught by faculty across disciplines; a community service learning course that incorporates inter-group dialogue; and a one-credit "student in the university" course highlighting the program's central themes.

A number of previously all-commuter campuses such as Wayne State University are using learning communities as a foundational strategy for building community as they make the transition from being a purely commuter institution to becoming partly residential.

Many residential research universities have a variety of different types of learning communities. The University of Colorado is a typical example of a major university with multiple learning communities that share academic connections. Their learning community programs—called "Residential Academic Programs" (RAPS)—are organized around different academic interests such as humanities, service learning, international studies, environment, leadership, and honors.

At the University of Wisconsin, living-learning communities have been developed to address a range of interests and special populations: WISE is for women in science and engineering, Bradley is all freshmen, the Global Village is aimed at students in international affairs, and Chadbourne Hall focuses on liberal arts students. A crucial element in designing some of these programs has been providing opportunities for direct student involvement in governance and decision-making. At Chadbourne, for example, students make decisions about budgetary allocations to support the learning community.

The 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (Inkelas 2005), involving learning communities in thirty-four research universities, found that the programs sorted into fourteen primary types in terms of theme:

- Disciplinary programs (67)
- Cultural programs (32)
- Transition programs (30)
- Fine and creative arts (22)
- Honors (22)
- Civic/social leadership programs (21)
- Women's programs (18)
- Wellness/healthy living programs (9)
- General programs emphasizing academic excellence (7)
- Residential colleges (7)
- Multi-disciplinary (4)
- Upper-division programs (4)
- Outdoor recreation (2)
- Research (2)

73% of these living-learning communities offered no courses for credit. 50% had no required co-curricular activities, though many offered a variety of optional activities. 33% had no faculty involvement. Faculty were more likely to be involved in learning community programs set up in academic affairs and funded, at least partially, by academic affairs.

This data suggests that living-learning communities could go much further in terms of connecting to the curriculum and exploring some of the other possible connections mentioned in the table on page 10.

General Education

An increasing number of institutions are going beyond first-year initiatives to design learning communities as part of their general education program, with the goals of improving curricular coherence, building community, and enhancing deep learning. While many of the learning community programs are one-quarter long programs, a number of institutions such as Wagner College, Skagit Valley College, Portland State University, California State University-East Bay, the University of North Dakota, the Quanta program at Daytona Beach Community College, and New Century College at George Mason University require students' participation in multiple learning communities.

Some of these institutions (Portland State, New Century, and Wagner) have a multi-year general education program that includes work in the major. Student affairs roles in these learning communities vary greatly, ranging from overseeing student peer advisors, to team teaching, to providing carefully integrated orientation and advising.

A number of learning communities also try to reinforce general education outcomes such as development of leadership skills. The Leadership Learning Community at the University of Missouri is open to students in all academic majors who are interested in developing their leadership potential. The program helps students develop the skills necessary to become effective and ethical leaders. Through co-enrollment in courses that explore critical leadership issues as well as participation in campus activities, service projects, and committees within the community, these students gain valuable practical experience.

> *Wagner College*
> *At Wagner College students enroll in three learning communities as part of the Wagner Plan for undergraduate education. The plan couples learning communities with experiential and community-based education, intercultural education, and the development of writing, research and computer competencies. Student affairs staff play a key role in the advising and experiential education aspects of the Wagner Plan.*

Developmental Education and Basic Studies

A number of institutions are building learning communities in developmental education and basic studies, an area of dramatic under-performance in higher education (Malnarich, with others 2003). Prominent observers often describe learning communities as a "best practice" in developmental education, often linking developmental education with college-level courses. With some notable exceptions (such as Grossmont, Kingsborough, and LaGuardia community colleges), these programs are usually small-scale innovative pilots rather than wholesale redesigns of an institution's entire developmental education curriculum.

Many institutions start their learning community efforts with linked courses, often beginning with linked assignments, as a way to support students' learning. The most promising trajectory in this work seems to be the practice of connecting developmental courses with college-level courses. Spokane Falls Community College has lots of highly successful paired courses; they are focusing now on links involving math and science. Not surprisingly, institutions often situate their learning community programs in developmental education as a result of the analysis they do of gateway courses (or curricular trouble spots, as they are sometimes called).

Designing a holistic program that integrates academic and student support services, often with peer tutors, is a key approach in effective learning communities focusing on developmental education at University of Texas at El Paso, IUPUI (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis), and LaGuardia Community College.

Gateway Courses

Gateway courses often act as critical filter courses or, more bluntly, graveyards where too many students are lost. Many learning communities now focus on these courses that operate as "gateways" to student success. Some of these classes are in the major, while others are entry-level courses in reading, writing, and mathematics. Mathematics is a common barrier. Calculus has long been identified as a critical filter class that impedes student entry into a variety of scientific fields. But Intermediate Algebra is the killer course that presents a bigger problem, especially in community colleges. Gateway courses can be easily identified as courses with large numbers of students with grades of D and F and high withdrawal and repeat rates, regardless of the instructor. The Diversity Scorecard Project at the University of Southern California involves looking at gateway courses in terms of institutional success

in producing "equity and educational success for students of color" (Bensimon 2004). At some institutions this perspective has been generalized to ask critical questions about whether some areas of the curriculum are disproportionately "failing" certain types of students and why. Learning communities that support these gateway courses often dramatically increase the student success rate by providing students with more time on task, an increased sense of engagement, and a supportive community of peers. Supplemental instruction is often used in these programs for students who need additional assistance.

Special Populations

Learning communities are also being situated around the needs of special populations, especially groups traditionally under-represented in higher education. As Emily Lardner and her colleagues note, learning communities hold great promise in fostering efforts to translate diversity into equity (Lardner, with others 2005). Many of these initiatives have found support through Federal Title III and Title V Department of Education programs. These programs frequently reside in student affairs departments, and student affairs professionals play the lead role in the delivery of all aspects of these programs. Learning community development in the HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) has increased dramatically in recent years; and the sciences are a focus of a number of these programs (Dawkins 2006).

Study in the Major

Learning communities organized around a major are also becoming more common. Some institutions, like Wagner College and New Century College, are utilizing learning communities throughout students' undergraduate careers in both general education and their majors. While disciplines in the liberal arts are the most common arena for learning community development, they are also found in professional programs such as allied health, nursing, and business. Engineering is leading the pack among professional areas that are embracing learning communities. Though still under-represented, the sciences are increasingly involved in learning communities. There is mounting evidence that supplementing or replacing lectures with active learning opportunities improves learning and knowledge retention (Twigg 2003; Seymour and Hewitt 1997). In large universities student affairs functions are often decentralized in the various schools. This creates opportunities for numerous ties to the learning community curriculum ranging from career preparation to advising to various supplemental services.

Business Learning Community (Drexel University)

In this program, a cohort of freshman students take at least two courses together. They are also required to participate in a student organization. Business Learning Community students attend academic enrichment workshops and develop leadership skills by earning a Creating Excellent Organizations (CEO) certification. Residential students live together on the same residence hall floor and commuter students have space in the Creese Student Union Center.

Men of Engineering (University of Missouri)

Male students pursuing careers in engineering participate in this sponsored learning community which offers a variety of co-curricular activities. Several "FIGs" (Freshman Interest Groups) are part of this learning community, with freshmen co-enrolling in three classes while also participating in co-curricular activities.

Inter-institutional Learning Communities

Since transition points between the different sectors in the education pipeline are known to be trouble spots for many students, learning community programs are starting to emerge that are inter-institutional collaborations geared toward improving transfer success rates and degree completion or creating early college/high school/college programs. Portland State University, for example, offers learning community programs in area high schools. The Evergreen State College has several community-based programs that partner with community colleges and aim to increase baccalaureate completion rates. These are described in subsequent articles in this publication.

The High School at Moorpark College is a "middle college" high school located on the campus of Moorpark College and designed as a thematic interdisciplinary learning community. The target population is high-potential junior and senior high school students who are not finding traditional high school to be an appropriate environment for learning. These students have access to Learning Community Institutes at the college level in addition to their high school curriculum. Joint faculty development programs involving both high school and community college teachers further cement relationships between the institutions.

As the preceding examples suggest, there are many different places to situate learning communities. Many institutions offer multiple types of learning communities to address different student needs.

Organizational Structures and Cultures

An institution's organizational structure and culture is often a key influence on its learning community program's evolution and development. As William Bergquist pointed out over a decade ago in his book, *The Four Cultures of the Academy* (1992), there are not only many different specialized groups within our colleges and universities, there are also different cultures. He argues that we have at least four distinct cultures—the collegial, the managerial, the developmental, and the negotiating cultures. All are necessary but their differing work styles, values, and assumptions often create conflict and misalignment. The cultural differences within the academy and the resulting struggles are a long-standing issue in the relationship between academic and student affairs. Anyone who has worked with both groups will recognize the different approaches each takes to decision-making, debate, and priorities; these approaches are deeply rooted in each group's history and professional horizons (Blake 1996).

Faculty members grow up professionally in a structure and system that has historically rewarded independent work. They tend to have more of a "guild" mentality, feeling profound allegiance to their discipline, which may appear at times to exceed their allegiance to their own institution or even their own department. Tenure provides the kind of protection that allows faculty to be institutional critics, challenging decisions made by the administration without fear of reprisal. The academic structure of departments, programs, and colleges often creates the classic "silo" mentality that discourages awareness of and involvement in the larger issues an institution may be facing. And, traditionally, faculty view the classroom and laboratory as the venues for student learning, venues over which they rightfully maintain control.

Student affairs professionals often enter the field because they enjoy the vibrancy of a student community. They are typically less interested than faculty in knowledge within a particular discipline and have often grown up professionally in work settings that value collaboration across functional areas. Without the protection of tenure, student affairs professionals are discouraged from being vocal institutional critics; thus the profession seems to favor those who are "good soldiers," accepting the decisions of senior administrators, at least on the public front.

What both cultures have in common is a recognition that resources are limited and a sense that a zero-sum approach is often used to deploy those resources. Money spent on a new student recreation center is money that is not available for laboratory equipment. (The fact that

these dollars come from different sources and are not often available for other needs is not always clear to either group.) Complicating matters is the power structure, unique to each campus, that determines how and how often these two groups are expected to work together. On some campuses, the work of faculty in traditional roles (teaching and research) is the clear priority, and student affairs efforts are limited to a service orientation. The entire area of student affairs may report to a chief academic officer, and its role in student life may consist of managing student behavior, residence halls, and dining services. On other campuses, student affairs staff may enjoy a genuine partnership with their faculty colleagues, with both groups recognizing the power that comes from sharing resources, perspectives, and goals. Many campuses fall somewhere between these two extremes, and their place on that continuum may change over time as the institution's politics and players change.

Partnerships as a Context for Learning Communities

Different cultural characteristics, coupled with competing needs and limited resources, have often led to a suspicious, or even hostile, relationship between these two groups. However, the last decade has seen a significant shift on some campuses. This change can be attributed to a renewed commitment to student learning on the part of student affairs professionals, and an increased appreciation for the role of outside-the-classroom learning by some faculty who have participated in collaborative efforts. The renewed focus on undergraduate education, brought about by calls for improved accountability and quality, has prompted efforts that require unprecedented cooperation (Schroeder 1999). Learning communities are one of these efforts, as are service learning, first-year seminars, and other emerging programs now being developed on numerous campuses. Recent research uncovering the inherent value and power in these two groups working together supports the creation of these programs (Kinzie and Kuh 2004).

Because each institution has a unique culture and decision-making process, the question of where learning communities "belong" is impossible to answer with a single approach. Some efforts are initiated by an academic department looking to improve its undergraduates' educational experience or improve retention of students in its majors. Some are the result of a commitment to interdisciplinary education, bringing faculty from different departments together to create interdisciplinary learning experiences. Still other learning communities

are formed to meet the needs of a specific population within the institution, such as first generation or first-year students, or to address a specific curricular trouble spot, such as intermediate algebra. This impetus may come from the provost's office, enrollment management, or academic advising. Some of the most popular learning communities develop as a response to student interest in a particular area, such as outdoor recreation, international issues, or sustainable living. These learning communities may begin as "special interest housing" and develop into learning communities when faculty join with students to add an academic dimension to their interest.

Of course issues of ownership come up in all partnerships. When learning communities are designed as a retention initiative, for instance, with entry-level math and writing courses, who owns the program—the retention specialist, the dean of students, the chairs of the math and English departments? If the program involves residence life does the residence program "own" the learning communities? It is the question of *ownership* that has often vexed the most well-intentioned faculty and administrators, for ownership implies responsibility, and that implies financial and other resource-related obligations.

Campuses with successful learning community programs have found ways to overcome an institution's divisional boundaries and have learned to rely on the unique contributions of each partner. Student affairs, for example, manages space in residence halls. There is no way to successfully plan and implement a residential learning community without the full support of residence life staff who control assignments, staffing, and the use of public space in residence halls. Must the department of residence life then "own" the learning community? That is precisely the attitude that frustrates faculty and others interested in maximizing the potential of proximity that a residential learning community provides. Residence life staff need to recognize the primacy of the learning experience and cede to their faculty partners as much control as possible. This often requires residence life staff to work outside existing timelines and structures, or even develop new ones. Can room assignments for learning communities be done differently than for other students on campus? They certainly can, if staff in residence life feel empowered by the senior management of student affairs to do so.

Faculty also need to consider new ways of doing things in order to make learning communities work. Department chairs and deans must recognize that business-as-usual approaches to creating class schedules won't work for learning communities that require block scheduling

and that cooperation with a service learning coordinator is essential if faculty want to provide service opportunities that relate to the program for their students.

When learning communities have costs attached (programs and activities, for example, or peer mentors), it is often student affairs that pays those costs. On most campuses, especially public institutions student affairs has more flexibility with its budget than academic affairs, and should make every effort to support learning initiatives that have significant faculty investment. But "significant faculty investment," or at least the clear potential for such a commitment, should be the *sine qua non* of student affairs support. While there is no place in learning community initiatives for proprietary attitudes that discourage and disempower others, the expectation that all partners come to the table willing to commit to the success of the program is a requisite characteristic for successful learning community efforts.

Ultimately, there is no one best place to "house" learning communities, or to administer them. A number of institutions with strong learning community programs, such as IUPUI and the University of Washington, have established university colleges as a way of providing coherence and leadership for undergraduate education. Others, such as Arizona State University and Iowa State University, have strong decentralized schools, which are the base of the learning community effort. At some institutions the vision and commitment for learning communities begins with faculty; student affairs partners are then enlisted, or student affairs professionals see opportunities to enhance learning communities and volunteer to join forces. On other campuses, learning communities begin in discussions among student affairs professionals, and faculty are enlisted later. But regardless of its birthplace, a learning community program can only thrive if everyone is able to set aside their professional biases and need for control, and imagine ways to overcome processes and procedures that hinder such collaboration. Moving beyond the rigid divisional structures that define higher education is a requirement for learning community success. And if learning communities can succeed through these new partnerships between previously distant colleagues, then perhaps other efforts to support student learning will ensue, using the same pathways and strategies that learning community partners have forged.

Ascending Steps of Learning Community Goals[1]

STUDENT LEVEL

New or reaffirmed values, aspirations, commitment
Enhanced leadership skills
Increased intellectual development, cognitive complexity
Academic maturity, self-confidence, and motivation
Deepened diversity and citizenship understandings and skills
Demonstration of learning outcomes (related to courses, LC
program, gen ed, study in major/minor)
Achievement (grades, overall GPA, entry into majors, pass rates for
proficiency tests, licensing exams)
Retention, progress to degree, grad rates (course completion, persistence,
completion of requirements)
Increased interaction with other students, faculty, student affairs professionals
General response: level of satisfaction, perceived benefits and/or challenges
Participation and enrollment

FACULTY, STUDENT AFFAIRS AND STUDENT FACILITATOR LEVEL

New or reaffirmed values, aspirations,
commitment
Enhanced leadership skills
Increased self-confidence and motivation
Widened scholarly interests and efforts
New understandings of other disciplines and the nature of
interdisciplinarity
New understandings of discipline or professional specialty
Deepened understandings about diversity and citizenship,
multicultural teaching skills
Enlarged pedagogical repertoire
Deepened understanding of students, student development, and student needs
Increased interaction with students
General response: level of satisfaction, perceived benefits and/or challenges
Participation

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Enhanced institutional reputation
Strengthened institutional culture (focus on
learning, and community)
Hiring, tenure, promotion, and other reward systems
supportive of LC goals
Increased cost efficiencies
Achievement of diversity- and citizenship-related goals
Strengthened curricular offerings
Improved campus climate
Fit with and movement toward institutional mission and goals
Positive interdepartmental or inter-unit collaboration
(academic affairs/student affairs)
General response: level of satisfaction, perceived benefits, and/or challenges
Understanding (degree to which institution is aware of, understands program)

What We Know about Learning Community Results

As the preceding pages indicate, learning communities are designed to serve different purposes. The outcomes of these efforts are usually multidimensional. The figure on the previous page describes some common learning community outcomes for students, faculty and staff, and institutions.

The monograph *Learning Community Research and Assessment: What We Know Now* (Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, and Lindblad 2003) provides the most definitive description of the extant research on learning communities. This monograph reviews more than 150 learning community studies, including a large hidden literature of local research reports. The report also provides a brief description of more than a dozen notable learning community studies. As the authors point out, most of the research on learning communities consists of local reports, with highly variable research designs. Assessment studies in community colleges are relatively hard to find, with most of the work concentrating on research universities. Like most assessment work, learning community assessment is evolving. There is a need for more sophisticated studies of the complex outcomes at the higher levels of the ascending steps described in the figure. One promising project designed to address the gap in the literature is the National Project on Assessing Learning in Learning Communities, led by the co-directors of the Washington Center, Lardner and Malnarich.

All that being said, the 2003 overview of the literature reaches a number of important conclusions:

1. Learning communities have broad reach in higher education and come in a variety of curricular and co-curricular formats.
2. The research reveals very promising results in terms of student   retention and academic achievement, as well as student and faculty satisfaction.
3. Little assessment effort has focused on "institutional matters or leadership issues related to developing, institutionalizing, and sustaining learning communities."
4. Much more research is needed to understand the nature of these interventions and their impact. (Taylor, et al. 2003)

In terms of specific research, Tinto's work in the early 1990s focusing on learning communities at the University of Washington, LaGuardia Community College, and Seattle Central Community College was, for many years, the most rigorous and definitive national study (1997).

Tinto's earlier research differentiated "between social integration, which is measured by such factors as interaction with faculty and participation in extracurricular activities and *academic integration*, which is usually measured by grades or other indications of academic achievement. This perspective implies that institutions should develop processes that foster both types of integration among college students" (Bailey and Alfonso 2005). Learning communities and collaborative learning captured Tinto's attention as an approach that could accomplish that. His learning community study came at a propitious time in the early years of the learning community movement because it demonstrated the positive impact of learning communities and collaborative learning on student persistence, academic achievement, satisfaction and engagement. The study was especially compelling in its description of how commuter campuses could establish vibrant academic learning environments.

Tinto's most recent work (Tinto and Engstrom 2006) focuses on the impact of learning communities on students in developmental education in two-year and four-year institutions. Preliminary results indicate that learning community students persist at equal or higher rates than the comparison group. Students in learning communities in two-year colleges demonstrated considerably higher levels of engagement on all dimensions assessed than their peers who were not enrolled in learning communities. This work will provide the most detailed look at learning communities in developmental education, an area badly needing attention. The qualitative interview data provides a compelling portrait of the importance of academic support services and sustained advising relationships as well as much information about ways the learning environment can be tailored to enhance academic success.

W. Norton Grubb and his colleagues at the University of California-Berkeley did a large-scale qualitative study of more than 250 learning community classrooms in community colleges throughout the U.S. (Grubb and Associates 1999) which concluded that they were very effective and highly variable in their implementation. They concluded that community colleges needed to pay much more attention to faculty development if they are to measure up to their potential as outstanding teaching institutions.

Other national studies of learning communities have been produced by disaggregating larger studies. These include the work of George Kuh and his colleagues at Indiana University using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and surveys by the National Policy Center on the First-Year Experience with John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot.

Like the larger learning community literature, research focusing

specifically on student affairs involvement with learning communities tends to fall into two categories: numerous local studies and a small number of inter-institutional studies. The research tends to focus on what is most easily measured at the lower end of the outcomes depicted in the figure on page 26. Two of the reports cited as "notable" in the Washington Center study of learning community research and assessment are local studies of living-learning communities at the University of Michigan and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; they provide extensive information on the ways learning communities affected students. Various local reports also point to the effectiveness of learning communities on a variety of dimensions by looking at issues such as the impact of peer mentors and supplemental instruction.

The most noteworthy inter-institutional study is the National Study of Living-Learning Communities (www.livelearnstudy.net), mentioned previously in this article, which looked at outcomes in thirty-four universities spread across twenty-four states. Approximately 24,000 students in living-learning communities participated in the study along with a comparison group. 274 living-learning community programs were analyzed. This study concluded that "students in [living-learning] programs are more likely to have positive peer interactions and perceive a positive residence hall climate. They exhibit stronger transition to college, academic achievement, and retention outcomes. They have higher levels of civic engagement and lower levels of binge drinking. However, there are no significant differences between [living-learning] students and their peers in other key outcomes, including cognitive development, self-confidence, and appreciation of racial/ethnic diversity." (Inkelas: http://livelearnstudy.net/nsllpfindings.html. Accessed December 29, 2006.)

In all cases, being clear on the purposes of the learning community is the crucial first step in doing learning community research according to Aaron Brower and Karen Inkelas, who co-directed the National Study of Living-Learning Communities.

Conclusion

Collaboration, especially in the form of structural partnerships, is critical if higher education is to reform and improve the practice of undergraduate education. Learning communities, in all their variations, are an important arena for that collaboration. Existing models, such as the ones mentioned in this publication, provide an exciting glimpse into the many different ways this collaboration can happen. But the

challenges inherent in such structures, also outlined here, can be vexing in environments where individual work is often the basis for reward.

Many institutions have managed to overcome some of the historical and structural impediments to forming effective learning communities. Creative resolution of issues such as coordinating timelines, sorting out "ownership," funding, recruitment, and rewards, as described in this chapter and further articulated in the following chapters, have allowed some institutions to develop highly successful learning community programs that are integral to the mission of their institution.

Further effort is required, however. Collaboration around assessment and research will be critical to continued learning communities success, and will help establish learning communities as permanent structures on campuses. Collaboration between faculty and student affairs will also be necessary to identify areas of emerging need as student populations and institutional priorities change. As student populations become more diverse, this partnership becomes even more important. Lastly, as our understanding of the ways in which students learn grows over time, learning communities must remain flexible structures, able to adapt to newer, more effective pedagogical methods. As a structure that emerged in response to the rigidity of early 20th century education, it would be ironic if learning communities themselves eventually became a rigid structure prompting future reform. A successful learning community initiative on any campus must be open to innovation and open to all partners committed to the deep learning of all students.

Endnote
1. Figure from B. L. Smith, J. MacGregor, R. Matthews, and F. Gabelnick. 2004. *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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