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Learning Communities in Practice

Learning Communities in Practice

Meeting General Education Goals

For many colleges, learning communities provide a structural solution to the need for curricular coherence. By combining courses that are included in the requirements for transfer, colleges have found that they can provide coherence, opportunities for integrative learning and the reinforcement of basic skills across the curriculum, and support for students' timely completion of degree requirements. The solutions vary, depending on state and institutional requirements and campus culture. Some schools, like Daytona Beach Community College and Collin County Community College District, offer the combinations as options while others—like Metropolitan Community College District, North Seattle Community College, and Skagit Valley College—either require learning communities or offer them as one way to meet required interdisciplinary experiences.

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Learning Communities as Options for General Education

Learning communities are offered as a way to provide coherence for general education at a number of community colleges. For instance, at **Daytona Beach Community College**, Daytona, Florida, the QUANTA program, one of the oldest and most well-known learning communities in the United States, offers a two-semester learning community experience as part of the general education requirements for the transfer degree. Open to all incoming freshmen who qualify to enter Freshman English I, each year QUANTA enrolls seventy self-selecting students, usually a mix of average ability, honors, and returning nontraditional students. Fully integrated and team-taught by three professors, it combines Freshman English I and II, Humanities I and II, and General Psychology and Psychology of Adjustment. A 1993 study of the QUANTA program shows mean semester retention rates of 92 percent for fall and 94 percent for winter from 1985 through 1992. In addition, an analysis of student writing using the Measure of Intellectual Development revealed that students in the learning community showed greater movement along the Perry scale of intellectual development than those enrolled in traditional college classes. After one semester in college, QUANTA students' scores were comparable to the scores of juniors and seniors. For further information, contact Casey Blanton, Chair of Learning Communities, at blantoc@dbcc.edu.

Similarly, **Collin County Community College District**, a multicampus district located in North Texas, offers learning communities as one way that students can satisfy the Texas Education Code core curriculum requirement of forty-two credit hours, with a minimum of six credit hours each in history and government. As a result, many of the Collin County learning communities pair history and government with core or elective courses, such as history with composition, "Rhetoric and the Republic," or government with social problems "Exploring America's Communities: Problems and Policies in Society," or even fitness, "Political Fitness." All Collin County learning communities, usually combinations of two or three core courses, emphasize active inquiry and experiential knowledge. Students who plan to pursue a bachelor's degree are encouraged to complete their entire core curriculum at the college before transferring to a four-year institution. Data gathered from institutional research

shows increased student retention and success in these classes. For more information, contact Gary Hodge, Dean of Social Sciences, Health & Public Services, at ghodge@ccccl.edu.

Learning Communities as Requirements for General Education

*The learning communities
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Several community colleges offer learning communities as one of several required options for degree completion. For instance, in 2002, the **Metropolitan Community College District**, which includes five colleges and nine locations in the Kansas City, Missouri, area, institutionalized learning communities as one way to provide coherence for general education. Called “learning enhancement requirements,” the interdisciplinary requirements provide special opportunities for the pursuit of individual learning objectives in the context of interdisciplinary, human diversity, or integrative study objectives. In addition to being required to take a course designated “writing intensive,” students may select among a human diversity requirement, an interdisciplinary learning community structured around a single theme, or two or more linked courses, at least one of which must be numbered 100 or above. The colleges in the district offer learning communities both as fully team-taught courses that embed two or more courses or as linked clusters that teachers plan collaboratively but teach separately. Assessment results show that retention rates are higher for learning community students and that the learning community experience serves as rejuvenating professional development for participating faculty. For more information, contact Beth Hill, Instructor of Speech Communications and Theatre, at hillb@maplewoods.cc.mo.us.

North Seattle Community College, in Seattle, Washington, which has offered learning communities since 1985, began in 1995 to require all students seeking the transfer degree to complete an integrated studies experience. The requirement is designed to help students reach four specific learning goals: to discover the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge, to learn how to work in problem-solving groups, to experience how writing is important in learning, and to develop their skills as independent, critical thinkers. Students can fulfill this requirement by selecting linked courses or a coordinated studies program.

Integrated studies combines two or more individual courses into one integrated program. With linked courses, students take separate courses and draw comparisons between the subjects. In coordinated studies, which are team-taught and scheduled as three- to four-hour blocks, students complete assignments, attend seminars, and take tests in one combined program organized around a central theme or question rather than a particular academic discipline such as history or biology. With an explicit aim of transcending narrow course boundaries, the faculty teams of two, three, or four instructors provide perspectives from their different academic disciplines. The learning communities seek to nurture students' academic skills and love of learning through emphasis on student participation, collaboration, and self reflection in self-evaluations, writing, seminar papers, and work groups.

North Seattle's schedule of learning communities includes some that are offered each year and others that vary from year to year. The “Beginnings” program, aimed at entering students, is offered each fall. In 2002, it combined

history, communication, literature, and women's studies as "Beginnings: The Shaping of Cultures, Myths and Identities." The purpose of the course is to provide students a chance to use their own life experiences as a starting point for examining values and identity and how those are shaped by history and myth. A second regularly offered program, called "Ways of Knowing: How to Choose What to Believe," explores classic epistemological questions from several different discipline perspectives, including philosophy and science.

North Seattle has done numerous studies of the impact of its learning communities. Program reviews demonstrate dramatically higher retention rates—83 percent or higher for students in coordinated studies. Quarter-to-quarter persistence rates for learning community students are equally dramatic, resulting in a 55 percent degree completion rate for the 1997-98 and 1998-99 academic years, compared to the 13 percent college-wide average. North Seattle has currently undertaken a comprehensive research study to analyze three years' worth of end-of-the-quarter student questionnaires, analysis of pre-/post-writing samples, and surveys of faculty to provide more insights into the qualitative development that takes place in these programs. For more information, contact Jim Harnish, Learning Communities/Integrated Studies Coordinator, at jharnish@secced.ctc.edu.

To meet its general education goals of creating curricular coherence and reinforcing basic skills in the context of academic study, **Skagit Valley College**, a multicampus college in northwestern Washington, requires learning communities, making them the centerpiece of its ambitious reform of general education. When the college began studying general education learning outcomes in 1987, assessments of existing learning communities revealed that they fostered those learning outcomes most difficult to meet with the existing "smorgasbord" of distribution requirements: to use a variety of analytical skills to solve complex problems, to analyze and use multiple and diverse perspectives, to understand the interconnectedness of fields of study, and to connect academic study to personal and social contexts. The assessments suggested that students in learning communities not only developed a strong sense of the interrelationships of fields of study and the value of diverse points of view, they also connected learning to both local and national communities. Because assignments drew from multiple disciplines, the learning communities also provided students the chance to develop and use more complex analytical abilities. As a result, the college institutionalized learning communities as a requirement for the transfer degree and as an option for professional or technical degrees.

The requirement for the transfer degree includes three interdisciplinary learning community combinations. At least one of these must include college-level composition; a second must combine courses from two different distribution areas. For the third learning community, students can choose from either of these or from a third kind of combination that could include basic (developmental) skills, college-level skills (for instance, reading or library science), or even technical courses.

Currently, Skagit Valley annually offers a mix of sixty linked and team-taught learning communities at two campuses, two remote centers, and online.

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Each quarter, students can select from a variety of conveniently block-scheduled combinations designed to satisfy the skills and distribution requirements. For instance, in one quarter, students on the Mount Vernon campus might choose to take introductory or advanced composition in “New Words on the Native American World” (ethnic studies), “Daily Planet” (astronomy), “WordPlay” (dramatic literature), or “Composition of Communication” (interpersonal speech), all of which meet two hours daily. In these classes, faculty collaborate to plan course assignments and activities so that learning for both courses of study is closely integrated. In another quarter, these students might satisfy distribution requirements for two different areas by selecting from “Feats of Clay” (geology and ceramics), “!Viva!—Mexican Voices/American Dreams” (comparative ethnic relations and literature), or “SEX.comm” (human sexuality and mass communication), all of which are team-taught, fully-integrated courses that emphasize student collaboration and integrative projects. Those students who are able to attend full time might choose to take “On the World Stage” (dramatic literature, political science, and either introductory or advanced composition), thus completing two of the learning community requirements.

Students who enter the college needing support for writing or math development might begin to meet their degree requirements by enrolling in “The Reading-Writing Connection” (basic reading and grammar), “What’s The Problem?” (basic math and writing), or “*En Otros Terminos/In Other Words*” (Spanish 101 and English grammar). Those who enter needing some assistance making the transition to college might decide to meet two interdisciplinary requirements by taking “Better Living Through Chemistry?” (global issues, environmental chemistry, and study skills). Students majoring in music might take “Rhapsody in Blue,” which combines modern art and music history, while those majoring in science or engineering might select “Celluloid Science,” which pairs film with any one of several required courses in biology, chemistry, geology, or physics. To accommodate the needs of students who take their courses in the evening or online, faculty who teach those writing classes design their assignments so that they can draw from course content in a number of arts or social science classes. The online learning community, “Images and History,” which is offered every quarter, creates student community through chat rooms. Studies at Skagit Valley have documented increased retention in learning communities, high levels of student satisfaction with their learning community experiences, and renewed faculty commitment to teaching and strengthening classroom practices. For more information, contact Lynn Dunlap, faculty member in the Department of Languages and Literatures and Coordinator of General Education, at dunlap@skagit.ctc.edu.

Meeting the Needs of Students in Professional/Technical Fields

A number of colleges have turned to learning communities to address the education goals of students in occupational and pre-professional fields. By combining prerequisites for certification or degree completion, the learning communities at Chandler-Gilbert, Lane, and Moorpark Community Colleges help students learn and apply the skills and knowledge in the context of their chosen professions. At Chandler-Gilbert and Moorpark, students can take

sequences of learning communities to meet the requirements for their professional-technical degrees. These programs also demonstrate ways that specific emphases—technical expertise or service-learning—can be easily incorporated into the learning outcomes of the learning communities.

The Williams Campus of **Chandler-Gilbert Community College**, one of the Maricopa Community Colleges in Arizona, has integrated pre-professional and general education courses in a two-semester learning community for education students called “Teachers Today & Tomorrow (T3).” Aimed at incoming freshmen selecting an education major, the course goals are to help education majors become better prepared for the occupational workplace while they become better democratic citizens by learning through service to their community. The learning community, which enrolls forty-four students each semester, is team-taught by two faculty and is fully integrated, with the education class driving the curriculum in English and computers. In the fall, students enroll in Introduction to Education (three credits), first semester freshman English (three credits) and PowerPoint (one to three credits); and in spring, in Cultural Diversity in Education (three credits), second semester freshman English (three credits) and Internet/Web (one to three credits). PowerPoint is used for all student presentations, and web portfolios are created during the second semester and updated in subsequent years. Students in the learning communities apply their required field experiences in K-12 classrooms to their own course studies. This community college program has been designed with university partners at Arizona State University East to ensure a seamless transfer for Chandler-Gilbert students into the university teacher education program. On the college’s Learning Communities Assessment, 93 percent of the T3 learning community students agreed that they felt more engaged in the learning process and experienced a stronger sense of community than in other college classes. For further information, contact Brenda Larson, faculty member in Education/CIS and Coordinator of the Williams Teacher Education Program, at brenda.larson@cgcmail.maricopa.edu.

Lane Community College in Oregon, offers learning communities for both health occupations and culinary arts. The learning community “BioBonds: Building Blocks for Your Body,” which combines two courses with historically high failure rates, Chemistry for Health Occupations and Cell Biology for Health Occupations, is now required for students seeking a Health Occupations major. By completing the learning community, students fulfill the prerequisites for Anatomy and Physiology, which is required for the associate degree in nursing. The learning community is fully integrated with two faculty using a variety of laboratory, group, lecture, and computer activities. Enrollment is twenty-five to thirty students in each of the five quarterly sections, and students in the course report that, based on their experiences in “BioBonds,” they would take a second learning community. A recent learning community, “Food For Thought,” links courses in culinary arts, basic math applications, and English as a way to examine the influential role of food, from providing nourishment to defining rituals and cultural values. In the basic math applications course, students study mathematics related to personal finance and health; recipe conversion and food

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Moorpark College in California

offers learning community

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purchasing; and the business of food, including markup, payroll, and taxes. All of these activities serve culinary arts students by expanding course material to a real-world application while fulfilling general education requirements. For more information, contact Cheryl Roberts, Vice President of Instruction and Student Services, at robertsc@lanecc.edu.

Moorpark College in California offers learning community institutes in the areas of health sciences, business, media arts, and liberal arts. The institutes are offered in four-semester sequence courses providing certificates, degrees, and transfers. Each institute differs in structure and the degree of course integration, but all offer a series of thematically linked general education and career courses. Moorpark also integrates campus efforts. A career center professional assists institute faculty with the infusion of career units within each specialty area, while service-learning and internships are made available to all students enrolled in the institutes. Learning community assessments indicate that students report greater confidence in their skill levels in fourteen areas. Noting that the features of learning communities that they particularly liked were the faculty-student interactions, the positive atmosphere, and the interconnection of the courses, more than 85 percent of the students stated that they would recommend learning communities to others. For more information, contact Victoria Bortolussi, Dean of Student Learning, at vbortolussi@vcccd.net.

Providing Support for Basic Skills and Language Development

A number of colleges offer learning communities to provide a supportive learning environment for students traditionally at risk in college studies. Some of these focus on developmental and others on English as a Second Language (ESL) skills. Many combine developmental or ESL courses with college-level course work, and a number of them incorporate study skills, seminars, and/or tutorial support. Program structures vary according to the specific needs of students and the college—three-course clusters and a model based on Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) at LaGuardia Community College, five-course clusters at Kingsborough Community College, team-taught coordinated studies at Parkland College, and paired courses at both De Anza College and Grossmont Community College.

Learning communities have been evolving at **LaGuardia Community College** in New York City since 1976, when the first liberal arts clusters were designed. Currently LaGuardia offers a variety of developmental learning communities to serve basic skills, ESL, and college-level students. A basic skills cluster, the “New Student House,” first piloted in 1991, was designed specifically for students whose dropout rate had been 41 percent. Only one of the seventy-five students enrolled in the pilot class did not complete, a completion rate of 95 percent compared to the 20 percent rate of students enrolled in the stand-alone versions of the courses. To date, retention and completion rates remain at or above 85 percent. In his study of the program, Vincent Tinto noted that the collaboration of faculty and student affairs staff was one of the program’s most effective strategies for promoting student success. In the program, students register for a full block of courses that includes basic reading, basic writing, freshman seminar, and a college-level content course, which varies from

semester to semester depending on the pool of eligible students in a given major. Recent house clusters have been taught with oral communication, business, and introduction to computer science. Faculty elect to teach in this program a semester in advance and plan a highly integrated curriculum that includes joint readings, projects, field trips, and large group meetings of the three different sections, or cohorts, of the “house.” A counselor teaches the freshman seminar course and meets regularly with faculty teaching in the house during the semester to offer guidance and feedback, especially for the most at-risk students.

Three years after the “New Student House” was established, an ESL version was developed, substituting ESL for Basic Writing, and Communication for the content-level course. In addition, ESL faculty have successfully paired 50 percent of their courses with college-level content courses, including Introduction to Business, Computer Science, and Human Services. A recent five-year study by the ESL program has shown that students taking their college-level courses in these coordinated pairs have higher pass rates and grades in both the ESL courses and the college-level courses than students taking the courses in stand-alone versions.

In the fall of 2000, LaGuardia piloted the Freshman Interest Group learning community model in which a smaller cohort of students travels within a larger group, taking Basic Reading, Basic Writing, Basic Math, Freshman Seminar, and a college-level course. The FIG group meets for an additional non-credit seminar hour each week. The faculty member teaching this seminar communicates with each of the teaching faculty and bases the work of the seminar on their suggestions as well as issues students raise. LaGuardia currently offers ten sections of this Freshman Interest Group model. The model was adopted in an effort to serve a much larger percentage of the incoming freshman population than could be served by the “New Student House.” Faculty teaching in the FIG integrated hour also meet regularly to evaluate the content and effectiveness of the FIG hour.

Because LaGuardia admits students from more than one 140 countries, special attention to teaching and learning styles is essential to student success. Learning communities, which are designed by faculty and supported by the administration, provide a flexible space where faculty and students can experiment and learn from each other. Faculty teaching in learning communities maintain that learner-centered pedagogy promotes inclusion and mutual respect as issues are examined from multiple perspectives. Student feedback on end-of-term evaluations suggests that the learning community environment offers a greater opportunity for students to build trust and to develop a sense of shared responsibility. For more information, contact Phyllis van Slyck, Professor of English and Learning Communities Coordinator, at vanph@lagcc.cuny.edu.

Also in New York, **Kingsborough Community College** has been offering its Intensive ESL Program since the mid-1990s in response to concern that second-language students needed to accelerate their acquisition of academic English so that they could move more quickly into credit-bearing English classes. The resulting program, designed by a faculty committee, has resulted in a powerful academic learning community in which faculty, students, counselors, and tutors work closely together in a collaborative interdisciplinary program.

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First-semester ESL students take a block program of five classes with the same group of peers for twenty-five hours a week. Faculty, tutors, and counselors collaborate both before the semester begins and regularly throughout to coordinate coursework to emphasize an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Intensive Program students in the most advanced of the three ESL levels participate in an integrated curriculum centered around themes from their history course, Popular American Culture. The professor of the ESL reading and writing course selects readings such as Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Russell Baker's *Growing Up*, which touch on important themes in the history course. In the speech course, students give speeches in which they assume the identity of someone from the historical period. Program-wide field trips also help give students a richer understanding of the historical time period, for instance, taking a trip to Manhattan's lower east side Tenement Museum. As part of the first semester program, students receive extensive support services. They take two, one-credit student development courses taught by faculty members on the counseling staff. In addition, they work closely with specially trained tutors, who also attend courses in the program and who serve as facilitators and mentors.

Over the years, the Intensive Program has consistently achieved its primary goal of helping students accelerate their learning of academic English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). In addition, at least 20 percent of students enrolled in the program skip the next ESL or English course after succeeding in department-wide assessments. The program has also achieved success in three corollary goals: enabling students to succeed in content courses in their first semester of college study, improving the retention and graduation rates of ESL students, and facilitating the integration of ESL students into the social and academic life of the college. For more information, contact Marcia Babbitt, Associate Professor of English and Co-Director of Intensive ESL Program, at mbabbitt@comcast.net.

Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois, determined that, to serve students entering college with seventh- to ninth-grade reading levels, it would use the coordinated studies model of a team-taught and extensively coordinated and integrated learning community. Parkland's second Integrated Studies Community, designed for students with a tenth- to twelfth-grade reading level, departed from college policy and the conventional wisdom of some developmental educators by including in each community a college-level transferable course that would not be available to students at these reading levels in the regular curriculum.

Parkland has experimented with different combinations of developmental and college-level courses and different combinations of full- and part-time faculty in the Integrated Studies Communities. Currently, students placed in the lower reading course are offered a community known as ISC II, which includes courses in developmental reading and writing, orientation to college, and introductory speech. The ISC III learning community, for students at the next higher level of reading, includes reading, writing, and psychology.

During the implementation of the program, quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment were linked to evaluation questions about students'

academic and social adjustment. While the adjustment scores of students in regular developmental courses actually declined over the course of a semester, the scores of students in the program, particularly those in ISC II, generally held steady or improved. Students in both ISC II and ISC III showed stronger commitment to the college than their comparison groups, suggesting one possible explanation for their higher rates of persistence.

The success of developmental learning communities at Parkland has encouraged faculty to think beyond traditional curricular structures and to develop initiatives for other groups of students, including honors English and a team-taught Forensic Science pairing between Chemistry and Criminal Justice. For more information, contact Jody Littleton, Learning Communities Coordinator, at jlittleton@parkland.edu.

Colleges in other parts of the country have found similar success in providing learning communities for students in need of support with basic skills. Of the nine learning communities offered each term in the Learning in Communities Program [LinC] at **De Anza College** in Cupertino, California, several are designed specifically to serve the population of underprepared and underrepresented students. A special feature of this strand of the LinC program is its dependence on a variety of members of the academic community, including instructional faculty as well as faculty and staff from student services, institutional research, and staff development. For instance, in the “Summer Express” combination of classes in pre-college reading, writing, and college orientation, students who have not qualified for college-level work participate in an intensive academic experience, after which 90 to 95 percent typically fully qualify to enter college. Other classes linking one pre-college course with a college-level general education class—for instance, pre-college reading with political science or developmental math with visual arts—let motivated students earn college credit while completing entrance requirements. Early assessments in learning communities for underprepared students have demonstrated impressive increases in student retention and success, indicating that the program has been a carrier for improved quality in classroom teaching and learning and has proven cost effective in its ability to ensure higher rates of retention and persistence. For more information, contact Edwina Stoll, Coordinator of Interdisciplinary Learning Communities Program, at stolledwina@fhda.edu.

Similarly, at **Grossmont Community College** in San Diego, California, the award-winning Project Success was designed in the early 1980s to increase academic success and student retention. The project, which includes both fundamental and transfer strands, now involves thirty faculty and approximately 600 students per semester. The fundamental strand requires students to enroll in basic writing and reading or in composition and reading as a way to support improvement in a wide range of language and communication skills as well as reading and study techniques. Although faculty may not team teach in the linkages, the pairs of faculty spend many hours preparing the courses and maintain close contact throughout the semester. According to research completed in 1995 and 2000, the linkages have resulted in a 12 percent higher retention rate for learning community students as well as higher grade point averages, and

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greater persistence in terms of students enrolling in the next level of English. For more information, contact Sue Jensen, English instructor and Project Success coordinator, at sue.jensen@gcccd.net.

Promoting a Seamless Education through Bridge Programs

*... small schools with
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In recent years, efforts have been made to make the educational process more seamless because far too many students fail to make the transition from one institution to another. Students of color are particularly at risk. Innovative bridge programs acknowledge that college and high school programs need not all be the same length. Varying the current structure of both the high school and college degree can address the educational needs and interests of these students. A number of these efforts are structured as learning communities, for instance, LaGuardia Community College's hybrid high school and college program; Tacoma Community College's Bridge with The Evergreen State College, designed for adult learners; and The Evergreen State College and Northwest Indian College Reservation-Based Native American Studies Program.

Middle College High Schools/Early College Programs

A large number of middle college high schools and other early college programs attempt to improve high school education with a seamless connection to college. These efforts share a common belief that small schools with high academic expectations can be highly effective in promoting student learning. Many of the middle college high schools, often located on a college campus, are structured as learning communities. **LaGuardia Community College**, a leader in this arena, offers the Middle College High School Program and the more recent International High School Program, hybrid high school-college programs that enable students to graduate with an Associate of Arts degree as well as a high school diploma. With the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, scores of new early colleges are being planned to foster a quicker and hopefully more effective passage to higher education. Information about the national network for these efforts is available at <http://mcconsortium.org>.

Two-Year College and Four-Year College Bridge Programs

The Evergreen State College has a long-standing commitment to educating students of color and supporting their communities. In a state where many students begin their college education in a community college, innovative approaches to articulation are necessary to increase four-year graduation rates. Unique bridge programs have been Evergreen's solution.

Tacoma Community College's Bridge Program with The Evergreen State College-Tacoma is a 12- to 16-credit, yearlong general education program for working adults that meets three or four days a week, including Saturdays. The program was created to provide a bridge for adult students of color who complete 90 credits through Tacoma Community College in order to enter the upper-division B.A. degree program at Evergreen-Tacoma.

The Bridge Program is a block of general education courses organized around a theme. The program is taught by an interdisciplinary faculty team. Collaborative learning and community-based project work are strong features of

the program. The program is designed to create a sense of community and an involving campus culture with few distinctions between the lower- and upper-division experience, and many opportunities to interact. In addition to gathering for common coffee breaks, Bridge students and upper-division students join together for a common lecture series and engage in related community projects. One year the campus focused on developing a people's history of the Hilltop, the multicultural community where the campus is located. The Bridge students did family histories of leaders in the Hilltop and gained experience doing ethnographies.

The Bridge Program, which enrolls about fifty new students each year, was established in 1985 with no new resources. The upper- and lower-division programs share space and some staff. The program has been highly effective in terms of student retention and the four-year graduation rate, and the expectation of completing a four-year degree is consistently present. Other key features include the diverse faculty, support from peers at the upper division, the location of the campus in the inner city, the focus of the curriculum combining both a local and a global point of view, and the careful alignment of the schedule around student needs. For further information, contact Kim Washington, Bridge Program Coordinator, at kwashing@tcc.ctc.edu.

The reservation-based Native American Studies Program is another example of a highly effective bridge program between The Evergreen State College and **Northwest Indian College**. In recognition of tribal authority, the program is only initiated when a tribe passes a resolution requesting the program. Focused on serving Native American learners on six Indian reservations, the partnership allows students to enroll with either institution depending upon their class standing. Faculty members teaching the yearlong, full-time interdisciplinary coordinated-studies program essentially work for both institutions. Community-based faculty members work with Olympia-based faculty to deliver the program on the reservations. Periodic weekend sessions are also held on the Olympia campus. Many of the college teachers and community volunteer teachers are Native Americans. Students in the reservation-based program develop projects that will strengthen their communities. The themes of the program are developed in collaboration with the participating tribes and currently rotate among the four themes of "Healthy Communities, Culture, Intergovernmental Relations, and Leadership." Nearly 100 Native American students are currently enrolled in the reservation-based program and demand for increased tribal sites and students slots grows every year. This program, along with Evergreen's other Native American initiatives, has built a reputation for the college as a leading institution in educating American Indian students. For further information, contact Michelle PenOziequah Aguilar-Wells, Reservation-Based Program Coordinator, at indianway@centurytel.net.

Connecting Students to Their Communities

At some colleges, students in learning communities study and become more deeply connected to their communities. Programs range from classroom assignments that take advantage of rich cultural resources in the local community, as at LaGuardia Community College, and through college-wide

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emphasis on integration of community-based or service-learning, as in the Collin County and Maricopa Community College Districts.

Students and faculty in learning communities at **LaGuardia Community College** expand their learning beyond the classroom walls, using the history and cultural opportunities of New York City as the basis for research and writing assignments. LaGuardia's learning communities include liberal arts clusters with basic skills and ESL courses paired with college-level courses. Many of these are organized around urban themes. Students in the ESL "New Student House," organized around the theme of immigration, use a field trip to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island for research that leads to written and oral communication projects. In "Movies and the City: Intercultural Images," students visit the Tenement Museum to deepen their understanding of immigrant conditions as they do research projects based on the novel and film, *Ragtime*. They also visit the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas, the Museo del Barrio, the Museum of the City of New York, and the New York Historical Society, as well as Little Italy, Orchard Street, and Loisaida, three neighborhoods on Manhattan's lower east side.

In the "Harlem on My Mind" cluster, students examine historical documents in the LaGuardia/Wagner archives (housed at LaGuardia) and then take a walking tour of Harlem for a research project on the Harlem Riot of 1935. Having discovered a fundamental truth of history—that there are always conflicting reports—students find that the Harlem tour helps them imagine and investigate the "scene of the crime," deepen their understanding of the riot, and change their perspective on Harlem, which most have never previously visited. "It's not the scary, crime-ridden place I thought it was," they comment. "It's a pretty decent neighborhood where some of the most historical events in New York took place."

In an ESL and Introduction to Human Services pair, when they are required to research and visit social services in the Queens neighborhood where the college is located, many students are surprised to find nearby agencies that help individuals with immigration, domestic violence, child abuse, addiction, and bereavement. Their field visits lead to writing projects in which they explore the problems individuals in urban areas face and the assistance that is available. In the "Moral Thinking" cluster taught after September 11, 2001, students focused on some of the ethical dilemmas raised by the World Trade Center disaster, for instance, whether disabled people should apply for jobs in high-rise buildings. Students toured the Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York, met with its director, and subsequently wrote papers in which they synthesized what they had learned in their visit and in English, Philosophy, and American Film.

Museums and theatres offer rich opportunities for students. The collections in the Museum of African Art, Museum of the Moving Image, Museo del Barrio, and Ellis Island have often been the focus of learning community assignments. Collaborative efforts with the Museum of Modern Art and the Jean Cocteau Repertory Theatre Company have provided rich opportunities for lectures, interactive presentations, and theatre workshops. Students sometimes receive discount tickets to performances. Learning community faculty comment on how

important it is not only to have activities at LaGuardia that reflect the artistic and cultural diversity of the city, but also to travel over the bridge into Manhattan, especially into neighborhoods students are unfamiliar with. As one faculty member observed, “We went to the Metropolitan Museum for a two-hour guided tour of one collection, and afterwards, many students stayed for another two hours. Most of them had never been to the Met. Many of them went back and some took their children. This is the beginning of an invaluable connection to culture in New York City.” For more information, contact Phyllis van Slyck, Professor of English and Learning Communities Coordinator, at vanph@lagcc.cuny.edu.

At some colleges, the learning communities provide opportunities for students to apply their learning within their local community as a way to deepen their civic engagement. **Collin County Community College** addresses this through the integration of service-learning into the learning communities program. Despite the political disengagement of college students, research at Collin County showed that many of their students had been involved in community service and, further, had become motivated by their experiences of making a difference in their communities. Collin County uses students’ interest in community service to enhance learning communities, create deeper learning for students, and instill values of citizenship and civic engagement. Data gathered from institutional research at Collin County shows that participation in these learning communities results in increases in student retention and success as well as increases in students’ communication and objectivity, practical experience in community organizations, and deeper understanding of democratic ideals.

In a sociology and government learning community, students select a social problem to analyze, as they would in a traditional social problems class, and develop a public policy that addresses the problem, as they would in a traditional government class. Another learning community integrates sociology and anthropology and focuses on Third World development. Students engage in service experiences ranging from work at local homeless shelters to mental health clinics.

In “The Road to the White House,” a learning community combining English, history, and government, students worked with the Texas Secretary of State’s Office, Project Vote Smart Youth Inclusion Project, and Rock the Vote to conduct a nonpartisan voter registration drive on campus before the 2000 presidential election. The study of people with disabilities was the focus of “The Politics of Liberation: Civil Rights, Civil Liberties, and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century,” combining government, history, and sociology classes. Students in this learning community volunteered with organizations serving persons with special needs such as Camp Summit, a residential barrier-free camp for the physically challenged, and Equest, an equine-assisted therapy and rehabilitation program for children and adults with a variety of physical, mental, emotional, and learning disabilities. For more information, contact Gary Hodge, Dean of Social Sciences, Health & Public Services, at ghodge@ccccd.edu.

The **Chandler-Gilbert Community College** service-learning program began in 1991 and has grown to involve dozens of faculty and thousands of students each year. The learning communities program began in 1995, and each year involves hundreds of students in linked, team-taught, and cross-disciplinary learning

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communities. Now at Chandler-Gilbert, most learning communities include a service-learning component to provide students the opportunity to learn in meaningful contexts.

In one learning community, “Creating Community in a Changing World,” students were enrolled in English, humanities, and computer courses in the fall and spring semesters, thus completing a large portion of their first-year general education requirements. Students were required to serve throughout the year at the House of Refuge East, a transitional housing program for formerly homeless families with children. In exit interviews and written reflections, students reported that looking back over the course of the year, they realized that the service-learning experience proved to be one of the most powerful components of building community within their community of learners. Their service experience expanded students’ understanding of the theme of community as they moved out of the classroom to explore firsthand issues that relate to homeless families, including poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and single parent families.

Other learning communities offer students the chance to explore potential careers or to learn in an immediate way how academic study connects with the experiences of people in the surrounding communities. In “Teachers Today and Tomorrow,” teacher education courses are combined with English and computers. Students investigate teaching as a career while providing valuable support to dozens of local area elementary schools. “Windows on the World” integrates first-year composition with contemporary women’s literature so that students examine the twentieth century through multiple perspectives. This class explores essays, plays, poetry, fiction, and film from various socioeconomic classes and cultural traditions. Service components include taking oral histories and serving in domestic violence shelters. “American Indians of the Southwest: Voice of the Past and Present” involves students in the study of ancient civilizations, art, spirituality, oral traditions, and social issues as it combines the study of English and anthropology. Students learn and serve with the Gila River Indian Community in order to better understand issues facing Native Americans living both on and off the reservation. For more information, contact Maria Hesse, President of Chandler-Gilbert Community College, at maria.hesse@cgcmail.maricopa.edu.