

## Learning in Communities (LinC) Program: De Anza College

*I appreciated the multiple perspectives and more meaningful contexts that two teachers and an integrated curriculum provides*

—De Anza student

De Anza College's 24,000 students commute from a ninety-mile radius to take courses at a college known for its record of student success in certificate, degree, and transfer programs. Located in Cupertino, in the heart of the Silicon Valley, De Anza's student body reflects various diversities—ethnic, class, gender, and educational preparation. Students are from more than eighty different countries, and 57 percent are people of color. New students are required to take an English placement test as well as basic skill tests in math and, depending on their program, in chemistry and biology. Eighty percent of these students place in developmental reading, writing, and math classes. Although the college's entering students are among the most underprepared in the Californian system, 1,800 De Anza students transfer to four-year public institutions each year, double the average transfer rate for California community colleges. The college is also among the top three community colleges in the country that award associate degrees.

The Learning in Communities (LinC) Program, established in fall 1997, has evolved from an array of interdisciplinary classes that began in the mid- to late-1980s in Language Arts and the accelerated Honors Program. Language Arts (LART), for instance, has offered integrated reading and writing links for developmental students for more than a decade. The curricular integration varies, as does the teaching format: links are taught by a team; by two instructors who teach individually, but adopt a common theme and share some assignments; or by one instructor. Despite severe budget cutbacks, the college has created five new LARTs to meet the needs of developmental students. In fall 2003 offerings included “America Reloaded: Reading and Writing in the New Millennium” (LART 100-Reading 100/English Writing 100b) and “Issues of Our Times: Personal Courage, Violence in Society, and Family Relationships” (LART 200-Reading 201/English Writing 100A).

Each academic quarter, De Anza students can choose from an average of ten different learning communities. Given that the majority of entering students place in developmental classes, most links, clusters, and cohorts are developmental or are combinations of developmental and general education courses. In fact, a major emphasis of the LinC program has been to foster curricular connections between developmental and general education courses. This approach reflects a broader institutional goal, the timely and successful transition of students from developmental to college-level courses. For instance, entering students who do not qualify for English composition can enroll in Summer Express, a six-week summer learning community that integrates classes in pre-college reading, writing, and college orientation. By fall, 90 to 95 percent of these students typically meet entrance requirements. The institutional commitment to student success means that faculty work closely with counselors who offer learning community students special office hours and counseling. Some LARTs are also linked to counseling. For instance, a LART 100 learning community, “Tabloid Trash, The Real World and You: Surviving and Succeeding on the Road to English 1A,” includes a counselor in the three-person teaching team.

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For students completing entrance requirements, earning college credit at the same time is motivating. The LinC Program offers two approaches to integrating pre-college classes with college-level general education courses. The first approach clusters courses around the linked developmental reading and English curriculum. For instance, in “Comics Speak Our Lives: The Graphic Novel Meets English 1A,” the developmental link is clustered with Arts 1A, an Introduction to the Visual Arts (this course has also been linked to developmental-level math). “Looking In, Speaking Out: Our Impact on Fashion and Consumerism” links developmental reading and writing and their respective labs with Speech Communications. Other versions link developmental classes to history, English literature, sociology, accounting, and business. The second approach combines a large lecture class with embedded cohorts, often in composition. This model was introduced by a political science instructor who invited English instructors to “merge” with his large Power and Voice lecture class to create three cohorts that would regroup from 25 to 50 students in ESL, Developmental English, or college-level English classes. A version has been adapted by other disciplines. For instance, an early-American history course, “Whose Country is this Anyway? Rewriting America’s History,” focused on people of color, regroups a cohort of twenty-five advanced composition/reading ESL students in a class of fifty to 150 students.

Ongoing assessment and research based on data collection and analysis is viewed as a critical means for sustaining, improving, and expanding the LinC Program. With the support of the college and the district’s institutional researchers, multiple assessment measures are used, including the Student Profile, success and persistence rates, Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF), reflective student essays, a student survey, and a faculty survey. Learning communities with consistently high retention and success rates include: LART reading and writing linked with counseling and tutorial components; LART reading and writing, a counseling component, and a general education/transfer Speech Communication class; ESL, a general education/transfer American History class with counseling and tutorial components; and, Developmental Math and Introduction to Sociology with counseling and tutorial components.

An important feature of De Anza’s learning community work is the extensive, ongoing faculty development program undertaken in collaboration with the Office of Staff and Organizational Development. Expectations and guidelines for designing, implementing, and assessing learning community curriculum are explicit; faculty who want to teach in a learning community are supported by workshops and in-service professional development. For instance, all faculty, including adjuncts, are introduced to Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), a collection of informal feedback strategies developed by faculty across the country and collected by Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (1993). These CATs, from the simple “muddiest point” to the more complex “Paper or Project Prospectus,” enable classroom teachers to find out how effective their teaching is based on what students are learning. Faculty are also introduced to the LinC Program’s use of Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) where staff routinely administer SGIF’s in the fourth and tenth week of

the quarter so students can collectively reflect on what is and is not working in their learning community. An analysis of student feedback is used to identify areas where faculty, collectively, need more training. The college provides budgetary support for conference travel, release time, stipends, workshops, and a retreat off campus every quarter for faculty and staff in the LinC Program and anyone else who is interested.

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*Regional Learning Communities Consortium (RLCC)*: <http://www.cal-rlcc.org>  
Created in 1999, the consortium includes De Anza and eleven other community colleges from four counties in Northern California. In 2000, the consortium received funding to support the design of learning community curricula, introduce faculty to learning community pedagogy and assessment, and further collaboration among consortium members. The RLCC continues to build on its early work on improving teaching and learning for underrepresented and underprepared students.

#### **Reference**

Angelo, T. A., and K. P. Cross. 1993. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.