

Learning Community Program Review

Program: Learning Communities Program
College: Delaware Technical Community College

Date: June 24, 2015

Program Components

1. Program Organizational Structure		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
1.1 The program structure includes clear supervisory position(s).	X	
1.2 The program structure includes sufficient/balanced oversight of components.	X	
1.3 The program structure is sustainable.	X	

Comments:

One concern regarding the programmatic structure of Delaware Technical Community College's Learning Community (LC) program is that the Collegewide LC Coordinator also serves as the Coordinator of one particular campus in addition to being an instructor. These are a lot of "hats" to wear as one person. As each campus LC program grows over time and more LCs move from one semester to multiple semesters, will this become overwhelming for the Collegewide LC Coordinator to have multiple responsibilities beyond the oversight of the collegewide LC program? I believe this supervisor structure is sustainable, but it's important that the Collegewide LC Coordinator keep the overall LC program across all four campuses in the forefront and ensure that the coordination of just the one campus she coordinates doesn't take priority. It's also important that the individual Campus Coordinators maintain the importance of LCs in their day to day role. Also wearing other "hats" and having other responsibilities beyond LLCs may cause one to worry that LCs could become a secondary priority if not coordinated by the right people.

Finally, each campus's Learning Community Action Team doesn't seem to consist of faculty teaching within individual learning communities. I would recommend that in order for faculty to feel as if they have a voice in the decision-making that is occurring not only on each campus but in the collegewide LC program, it is recommended that one faculty member from each LC sit on the LC Action Team that exists on their campus. This will strengthen the relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, will improve communication across all LC constituencies, and invest your faculty beyond only their individual LC to having ownership over the success of the LC program as a whole.

2. Recruitment & Outreach Materials		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No

2.1 Materials reflect clear goals.	X	
2.2 Materials promote the program.	X	
2.3 Materials are visually appealing.		X
2.4 Materials attract interest of prospective students.		X

Comments:

Though Delaware Technical Community College has created a number of flyers and inserts that are shared with students when they meet with their academic counselor in the advisement center or their program advisor if they're a returning student, these flyers and inserts seem more informational than they are appealing. These informational pieces are of the utmost importance and promote the academic components of the program, but are they selling the learning community experience? The experience is much more than just a cluster of courses. I wonder if showcasing the co-curricular components of the LC program as a whole or of individual LCs showcases the exciting and energetic components of the LCs that actualize what is happening in the classroom. The current materials, though informative in regard to the goals of the program and the tangible benefits of the experience for students, seem to lack the excitement that can be generated among students in a community. I also wonder if LC faculty can be integrated into the recruitment process for the LC experiences that they are offering to students. Again, this is just another opportunity to strengthen the relationship between faculty and the larger LC Program.

One last recommendation in regard to the recruitment and outreach of students is the usage of the term "field trip." The phrase "field trip" seems like a high school term, which may cause both traditional and non-traditional students to choose a different path that is not a LC. I would encourage the faculty/staff at Delaware Technical Community College to begin to replace "field trip" with "co-curricular program." Co-curricular opportunities can focus on either building community or may be opportunities that expand learning beyond the classroom to other spaces on campus or even into the community beyond campus. These opportunities invigorate students to learn and connect content across campus. This comes across in the video on the college's website, but is currently lost in the promotional materials students are provided by their academic counselors or program advisors.

3. Comprehensive Action Plan		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
3.1 The plan includes all pertinent areas to be addressed.	X	
3.2 Sufficient resources are provided.		X
3.3 Responsible parties are adequate.	X	

3.4 The time frame in which to address items is realistic.	X	
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Comments:

The action plan developed via three teams at the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities was extremely thorough. It provided a timeline that included a roll out of 1 new LC per semester at each of the Delaware Technical Community College's four campuses while also considering how to develop and implement learning communities specifically for the college's academically at-risk students. In addition, the goal of hiring a coordinator/director to oversee the LC program across all four campuses is vital to the success of this program. This action plan clearly articulated a goal of developing a faculty handbook designed to recruit new faculty. It also addressed a plan to engage these recruited faculty in professional development opportunities that would allow them to create their LCs and better understand curriculum integration and building effective co-curriculum. Finally, the action plan clearly showcased a strategy to create a seamless assessment plan.

The only area that didn't seem clear was the identification of a budget for each LC. It seems that each campus will receive a LC programmatic budget, but that each LC isn't given a clear budget. Instead, LC faculty teams have to apply for money when they'd like to engage their students in co-curricular opportunities. When LC faculty teams are given a clear budget that they know they can use for their students over the course of a semester, they will be more apt to create these types of co-curricular opportunities. However, having to apply for funding may prevent faculty from developing some of these programmatic pieces that build community and extend learning beyond the classroom. I would encourage the campus coordinators to consider identifying a consistent budget that is given to each LC at the start of every semester and challenge them to exhaust that budget over the course of the experience. This will ensure that faculty are creating these opportunities while being given ownership of their LC and student participants are getting the most out of their LC experience.

4. Summer Institute Materials		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
4.1 The pre-institute considerations list is comprehensive.	X	
4.2 The during-institute considerations list is comprehensive.	X	
4.3 Presentations are effective in addressing topics appropriately.	X	
4.4 The Institute calendar of events is organized appropriately.	X	
4.5 The Institute topics are appropriate.	X	

4.6 The post-institute considerations list is comprehensive.	X	
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The summer institute seems to be a great opportunity to excite new faculty to consider structuring a learning community on campus while also providing sufficient time to begin to consider and plan integrated assignments and build co-curricular programming. The two suggestions that I thought may improve this particular opportunity may be to add a focus of assessment into the summer institute, once an assessment plan is created by the LC Campus Coordinators. This will allow new faculty to understand how their work will be assessed before, during, and after they offer their LC to students. Communicate that this assessment will allow them to improve what they're doing in the classroom and ensure they're achieving student-learning outcomes. It may also be beneficial to provide the faculty handbook, once this document is created, to all faculty who are being introduced to the LC program for the first time at this summer institute.

One last recommendation would be to consider mandating that those faculty/staff who attend the keynote at the start of the week continue through the remainder of the four-day institute. This message may be best communicated "top down" if the Collegewide LC Coordinator doesn't feel this message can be best communicated from her in her current role. My reasoning behind this suggestion is that if these faculty are devoted to building this LC experience for students, then it's important they are engaging in all of the presentations that your LC team has put together. All of this information - from co-curricular programming to making connections deliverable, to creating thematic cultures, to curricular integration – is extremely pertinent to ensure they offer a comprehensive experience for their LC students. This approach also creates a culture of importance surrounding these professional development opportunities. Finally, I'd recommend – and you may already do this – having current LC faculty present during the entire week of this summer institute. New LC faculty will value their peers participating in this experience as potential mentors alongside the four LC Campus Coordinators.

5. New Learning Community Development Materials		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
5.1. New Learning Community Approval form includes all pertinent information.	X	
5.2 New learning community approval form includes all necessary signature lines.	X	
5.3 Collaboration and Development forms 1 and 2 include appropriate goals.	X	
5.4 Collaboration and Development forms 1 and 2 include all pertinent areas addressing each goal.	X	

Comments:

The new learning community developmental materials are very thorough and seem to require enough information that will allow the LC Campus Coordinators to evaluate whether or not the LC should be offered to students. One question that I have when reviewing these materials is if Collaboration and Development form 1 is necessary. I think Collaboration and Development form 2 inquires about how coursework will be integrated, as it requires a description of integrated assignments and allows faculty to identify the programmatic pieces of the program that will enhance curriculum and build community. However, Collaboration and Development form 1 seems to ask detail about attendance policies, late-assignment policies, participation and group work policies etc. that I'm not sure are pertinent to whether or not an LC should run. If these types of details are important, I'd encourage your team to set attendance, participation, and late-assignment policies that span across all LCs, ensure LC faculty are a part of this conversation, and gather a consensus of what these policies should be.

When reviewing Collaboration and Development form 2, I do wonder if requiring 3 integrated assignments in one semester is too much. At that point, are you requiring too much of your faculty and more importantly too much of your students. With that many integrated assignments, are the assignments thoughtful and truly integrated or are the connections loose? I don't know the answer to this, but this was a question that was raised in my mind as I reviewed this information. One assignment that is truly integrated and threads through multiple courses could potentially take an entire semester to fully evolve so that students are able to fully recognize the connections across multiple courses. This is not to say that there are not other approaches to create integrated assignments with looser connections that are effective. However, it is just food for thought. I think that if clearly articulated (regardless of the approach), the description of integrated assignments can in itself communicate the alignment of course goals and shared learning outcomes, which are being asked in Collaboration and Development form 1. You may be able to combine these two forms to streamline the proposal process.

6. Field Trip/Co-Curricular Activities Travel Forms		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
6.1 The Activity Funding Request form includes all necessary information and signature lines.	X	
6.2 The Travel Request includes all necessary travel information and signature lines.	X	

Comments:

I spoke to this area earlier in this review under section #3 "Comprehensive Action Plan." However, I'll quickly mention this again. Though I believe these funding request forms include all the necessary information and signature lines and travel requests include all the necessary travel information and

signature lines, I just wonder if you're asking a lot of faculty. Is it necessary to ask faculty to request funding every time they want to offer a co-curricular program? Why not provide them with ownership of a budget (regardless of what that budget looks like) that they must exhaust before the conclusion of the semester. From my own experience, when LC faculty teams are given a clear budget that they know they can use to enhance their students experience over the course of a semester, they will be more apt to create these types of co-curricular opportunities. However, having to apply for funding may prevent faculty from developing some of these programmatic pieces that build community and extend learning beyond the classroom. Once again, consider identifying what impact providing faculty teams with a budget they control (and the Collegewide LC Coordinator oversees and signs off on all expenditures) could have on encouraging faculty to offer more co-curricular opportunities.

7. Student Survey (assessment)		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
7.1 The survey addresses the student's experience in a learning community.	X	
7.2 The survey addresses the benefits of the learning community format.	X	
7.3 The survey encourages accurate assessment of the learning community program.	X	
7.4 The survey collects sufficient information to accurately reflect students who enroll in learning communities.	X	
7.5 The survey allows for student's own comments and feedback.	X	
7.6 The range of survey indicators is sufficient.	X	

Comments:

This survey accomplishes all of the review standards above. However, there is no control group to compare the LC experience to. This assessment tool is effective in identifying the impact of the LC experience on your LC students. Yet, I'm left wondering how the LC experience compares to the experience a student is having when not enrolled in an LC? The only way to truly do this is to have a common survey that speaks to the learning experience of all students and then to separate which surveys were completed by LC students, and which surveys were completed by non-LC students. It's here that you can truly identify the impact that LCs have on the student experience.

In regard to when this survey is administered, I can imagine that the easiest way to compile results is by students completing this survey electronically. However, you may receive a better response from students if LC faculty administer these surveys in class. LCs typically result in better attendance in LC

classes. If this is also the case at DTCC, which I assume it is, then this method would be most effective in ensuring close to 100% of your LC students are completing this survey. I know it may cause a challenge when having to record the results; however, you may be able to identify a student worker or work-study student who can take on this endeavor.

Finally, in addition to this qualitative assessment tool, your LC team may want to consider assessing academic progress of students who have gone through the LC experience compared to those who have not. Also, what are the retention and graduation rates of LC students compared to those students who choose not to participate in a LC? The rubric that you're developing to assess integrated assignments will also provide you and your team with great insight into academic progress and student recognition of connections across academic courses.

8. Presentations		
<i>Specific Review Standard</i>	Yes	No
8.1 Presentation content is appropriate to subject being addressed.	X	
8.2 Presentations are visually appealing.	X	

Comments:

I've placed my ratings in regard to these presentations in the middle here because I'm not 100% clear on whom these presentations are designed for. The "Advisement Update Overview" seems as if it would be a presentation that your academic counselors are using to share with students. If this is the case, then this presentation makes sense to me and seems clear and concise. The presentation titled "LC Update, Jan 2014" also seems clear and concise in regard to the direction the LC Program on your campus is moving and what the next steps are. I'm sure this was helpful for faculty/staff who were not currently involved in the LC Program in January 2014 and may have led to recruitment of faculty to propose LCs. As for the presentations titled "Teaching and Learning Expo" – this presentation had very little information and mostly "holder slides" for pictures. I'm not sure who the audience was for this presentation but I think this presentation could be a bit clearer and could include more concrete information.

Final Comments:

Overall, the growth and expansion of Delaware Technical Community College's Learning Community Program has been impressive. A lot of work has been accomplished in a short span of time and the clarity of the action plan that was developed at the National Summer Institute on Learning Communities helped set a path for that process. I've made several recommendations above; however, I wanted to mention four impressive highlights observed in this review:

- 1) The goal of adding one new learning community on each campus per semester is a lofty goal, but it seems that each campus has tried to live up to this expectation that they set for themselves. This can be a challenging task and the recruitment of faculty and of thematic ideas to meet this goal is impressive. The hardest part of LC development is gaining faculty buy-in and launching a LC. Once LCs are launched, they can be strengthened from year to year. Your program is accomplishing the most difficult part and can refine and revise curriculum and co-curriculum to improve these individual LC experiences.
- 2) The Summer Institute is a wonderful opportunity to generate interest and buy-in across campus. These professional development opportunities will only continue to improve and strengthen your program, will serve as a catalyst for new ideas, will challenge faculty and staff on campus to consider how their areas or their work can connect with your LC Program, and strengthens your network of LC Program advocates that exist across all four campuses.
- 3) The effort your team has placed to create a stronger relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs is obvious. It seems that you want to continue to improve this relationship and I think this can occur by incorporating faculty into the decision-making process regarding the larger LC Program. This will allow faculty to connect, interact, and work more alongside Student Affairs colleagues. Having said that, most institutions are not intentional in regard to creating this relationship between divisions and so that in itself showcases your dedication to this program's success.
- 4) Finally, I really appreciate the priority scheduling that has occurred when it comes to your LCs. The fact that academic counselors and program advisors are pushing LCs first in the course scheduling and advising process is so important to the recruitment of students. Communicating why these experiences are so vital to student's academic success shows the institutions dedication to wanting to enroll more students into these experiences. I'm sure this didn't occur overnight and that the Collegewide Coordinator and Campus Coordinators have fought for and advocated to ensure this is a priority in the advising process.