

National Learning Communities Project:

With funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts, The National Learning Communities Project strives to strengthen curricular learning community efforts on individual campuses, as well as to foster more robust communities of learning community practice.

Hundreds of undergraduate campuses have been creating curricular learning communities, approaches that purposely restructure the curriculum to thematically link courses and enroll a common group of students. These initiatives vary greatly from loosely-linked courses all the way to team-taught programs of integrated, interdisciplinary study. Yet they share common intentions:

- to rearrange the curricular time and space of both students and teachers
- to foster community, coherence and connections among courses
- and to create more sustained intellectual interaction among students and their teachers.

In the past decade, the learning community approach has kindled the imagination of faculty members, student affairs professionals, and administrators. In fresh and exciting ways, learning communities confront many issues simultaneously:

- the need for student engagement in learning, especially on commuter campuses and in the first year of college;
- the need for curricular arenas where students make connections and find relationships between disciplinary bodies of knowledge;
- the opportunity for teaching critical reading, analytical writing and persuasive speaking in the context of a discipline;
- the opportunity to explore compelling interdisciplinary problems best illuminated by multiple perspectives;
- the importance of fostering intellectual ties between students and their teachers;
- the opportunity for faculty members to stimulate and revitalize each other's expertise and teaching;
- and the need for teachers and students alike to take more seriously the responsibilities of working to create community and belonging to one.

Research on the effectiveness of learning communities reveals that they live up to their intentions. Formal empirical studies and program evaluations indicate that learning community programs :

- increase student engagement and motivation;
- increase course completion rates, particularly on commuter campuses;
- foster increased student intellectual development;
- and contribute to faculty and staff development and revitalization.

Where targeted to under-prepared learners, these programs increase course completion rates and academic achievement in developmental and college-level courses.