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The first year student experience on many campuses has a first-year seminar as its primary component. Learning communities can be structured around such a course. One model for integrating campus support for entering students is to have the first-year course taught by an instructional team, often with links to a disciplinary course. Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis has defined team members as the following: faculty, academic advisor, librarian, and student mentor. Faculty also serve as instructors in the linked course. Student mentors lead supplemental instruction groups in the linked course.

Learning Communities: An Instructional Team Approach

In the world of higher education where acronyms are used to designate everything from standing committees to GPAs and GREs, the term *learning community* is refreshing. It suggests another time and place, far removed from the reality of university life as it is experienced by most students, faculty, and staff, and it connotes images of intimate conversations with faculty—very close tutorial relationships between instructor and student. Such images have strong meaning for many on campus at a time when students, and indeed much of American society, struggle to define the real purpose of higher education. We seem to come up short. What has powerful emotional appeal—this sense of what is most important—can seem unattainable in our era.

We argue that the words, *learning community*, remind us what we in higher education are all about. We fell in love with university life long ago, and we stayed because we valued what we found in the academy. In the bustling, often impersonal environment of the modern campus—especially on the nonresidential campus—we face a severe challenge as we seek for our students the love of learning that we attribute in large part to those personal relationships we value so highly from our own experience. The goal of a learning community program is to replicate those personal relationships and—by exten-

sion—to provide access to resources that will lead students to fall in love with learning. What are the essential features of such a community? Can they be replicated on an urban, commuter campus?

Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is Indiana’s third largest campus. Formed from a consolidation of Indiana University and Purdue University programs in the capital city in 1969, IUPUI is Central Indiana’s public university. In a state without a community college system, IUPUI has made the functions of community college a part of its mission and it maintains an essentially open admissions policy. The university is committed to becoming a model for urban education and has focused efforts in recent years on improving the retention of its beginning students. A central thrust of those efforts has been the IUPUI Learning Community Program.

Several years ago, Alexander Astin suggested in a presentation on IUPUI’s campus that retention of students is closely related to their immediate needs. On residential campuses, leaving college means that students will have to change residency and abandon friends and social priorities, an action clearly disruptive to their daily lives. Remaining in college becomes, therefore, a priority. On commuter campuses, however, when students choose to leave college, that action does not require a change in their residency. Often they have failed to make friends on the campus, and their social lives still revolve around their families, high school connections, and work. When college becomes challenging or disappointing, or when there are changes in financial priorities, students find that leaving college immediately eases their stress without overly disrupting their daily lives.

As a follow-up to Astin’s observation, IUPUI made a commitment to implement policies and practices consistent with those of the Study Group on Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education (1984). A variety of programs designed to involve students in their learning, to articulate and support high expectations, and to provide assessment and feedback—as recommended in that report—have led to improvements with the undergraduate experience. The campus therefore began the development of learning communities as a primary means of helping students make the transition to university study. The development of such communities, appropriate to our context as an urban university, was seen as a key means of “front-loading” our work with students. Many of the earlier efforts had not centered on student learning; they had instead focused on improvements in student services. The new approach stressed student learning—in the classroom and involving faculty.

The First-Year Seminar

At IUPUI, learning communities were intentionally designed to help students establish connections with members of the university environment so that remaining in college would become a priority. We developed a first-year seminar as the central component of the learning community, and defined its objectives as follows:

- Students at IUPUI need an introduction to the expectations and practices of the academic community.

- Because the Principles of Undergraduate Learning underlie their learning experiences at IUPUI, students need to understand the Principles (*Note: IUPUI has no common general education curriculum. The Principles provide the framework for articulating expectations of our undergraduate students.*)
- As students do academic planning, they need to understand disciplinary perspectives, IUPUI policies and procedures, available support services, and habits of scholarly work.
- Small group interaction with peers and instructors is important to build community and to learn the norms of knowledge building.

We invited faculty from the schools to join us in developing seminars with the following features:

- General introduction to IUPUI's resources and opportunities
- A focus on responsibilities and expectations of being a college student, including studying, examinations, and academic integrity
- An introduction to resources for goal identification and academic planning
- An instructional team approach to course development and presentation (such teams are composed of faculty, advisors, university librarians, student mentors, and resource staff on technology)
- An introduction to the concept of disciplines
- An introduction to the Principles of Undergraduate Learning
- An introduction to electronic communication and technical support for students at IUPUI
- An introduction to the use of the IUPUI University Library

Seven faculty from the School of Liberal Arts worked together to pilot this seminar as the core of learning communities, and defined the instructional team as central to the effort. The model of interdisciplinary seminars (e.g., Freshman Interest Groups, ["FIGs"]) employed in many contexts was not feasible, because in them faculty working alone or in teams develop interdisciplinary courses as a core of the learning communities. The model at IUPUI needed to be one that defined collaboration in a more inclusive way. Thus, the first-year seminar is itself the core of the community, and its objective is to create environments in which students form connections with representatives from units that will be critical to their academic success in the institution. Through that process, students can learn to trust the university community to continue to provide support beyond the learning community experience. The instructional team model was designed, therefore, to include the following:

- Faculty member
- Academic advisor
- Librarian
- Student mentor
- Technical support.

Established on a pilot basis in the fall semester of 1995, learning communities have expanded from the original seven sections to a projected 71 sections for fall semester 1998. With the growth of the program, approximately 1700 freshmen will participate in the learning community environment, all of which include the first-year seminar, sometimes offered on a stand-alone basis but more often linked with one or two disciplinary classes. An increasing proportion of the learning communities are specifically designed to introduce students to their majors as well as to the university environment. All undergraduate schools are now either offering the first-year seminar as part of a learning community or they have the course under development. On a campus composed primarily of professional schools with strong accreditation demands and characterized by fierce academic autonomy, the widespread adoption of the model is an affirmation of the faculty's commitment to increased support for student learning.

The Instructional Team

IUPUI learning communities are structured to provide participants with as much academic support as possible, and students are encouraged to work collaboratively. The intent is that students will acquire the skills necessary to succeed in college, become familiar with campus resources, and make personal connections with each other and with the members of the instructional teams. As one student stated, the experience was valuable because "college is a bit overwhelming at first," and the instructional team approach brings you in contact with "people within the university that you know, so you aren't nervous and you feel comfortable asking questions."

A committee of the University College provides coordination of the communities, and a faculty committee, including members from the schools offering the course, coordinates faculty participation. The University College, again working with the schools, assigns advisors and coordinates their work. The University Library assigns a lead librarian for coordinating the work of the librarians. In addition, the University College coordinates the work of the student mentors. Each instructional team works together to develop the syllabus, offer the course, and assess course outcomes. In addition, persons work together within roles to reflect upon their efforts and to define successful practices for the implementation of the teams from the perspective of that role.

The Faculty's Role

Too often, entering students are unable to form relationships with any full-time, tenured faculty. One of the strategies we often articulate for upper-division students who will be seeking endorsements for graduate school or employment is to suggest that they make certain that at least one faculty member knows them by name and by work before it is time to ask for letters of reference. Entering students are often taught only by associate faculty and by graduate students, and when full-time faculty are present, it is primarily in very large classes where graduate assistants provide the instruction.

Yet, faculty control the culture of the university. A primary goal of the learning community program is to provide the context in which entering students form connections with a faculty member. Students benefit when they can experience the intellectual excitement that a faculty member brings to his or her discipline. Thus, in many learning communities, the same faculty member is part of the instructional team for the first-year seminar and is also the instructor for the discipline-based course.

Many other learning communities, most often those sponsored by the professional schools, are designated for freshmen who declare specific majors. In such sections, faculty members from those schools introduce students to their chosen fields of study. The connection with the faculty provided by the learning community environment is probably the single most important benefit of the IUPUI Learning Community Program.

The Academic Advisor's Role

The academic advisor attends all class sessions of the first-year seminar and works with students throughout the semester to ensure that they receive timely information about university regulations, course requirements, career and major selections, and academic policies. Students come to know their advisors. They become comfortable with them, ask questions as they arise, and no longer have to wait for scheduled appointments to see them. This connection with the advisor is frequently noted in student evaluations as one of the most valuable aspects of the program.

The connection with the advisor also often continues after the learning community has ended. Students are more likely to seek the support of their advisor in subsequent semesters. As one reported, "I felt much more comfortable going to the advising office because I know someone there. Because of my [learning community] advisor, I am much more likely to visit the advising office in the future."

The Librarian's Role

Library resources are increasingly electronic in nature, and librarians are the information specialists who are central to providing access to information. Faculty themselves are sometimes at the "card-catalog" stage and therefore not competent at using the rich array of resources now available. Although the librarians previously offered special sessions for visiting classes in the library, they reported that students often sat politely but did not get engaged in seeking information in ways that would have any ongoing effect on their behavior as students. Librarians now work with all other members of the instructional team to develop the syllabus for the first-year seminar and to conduct the class, and while they do not typically attend every class meeting, they are regular members of the team and become known, by name, to the students.

The course syllabus includes sessions designed by the librarians, and some sections require multimedia projects requiring resources that only the library can provide. All sections include intensive introductions to bibliographic information that is available through electronic means. Since the library is the intellectual heart of the campus, it is telling that librarians report how often students go out of their way to

greet them. And, as students make increased use of the library in the semester both when they are enrolled in learning communities and in subsequent terms, librarians report that students sometimes come to the circulation desk and request to see their "own" librarians as they complete their projects.

The Student Mentor's Role

Student leadership on the instructional team is critical. *Supplemental Instruction* (Martin, Blanc, and DeBuhr, 1983) highlighted the critical role of students as mentors in creating a powerful focus on other students' learning. When students in peer relationships center on learning, new students have the interpersonal models and support needed to become committed learners. We thus assign a student mentor as part of the instructional team to attend each class meeting and work with those inside and outside of class to model academic success.

The mentors, most of whom have taken the class themselves, are aware of the fears, concerns, and misperceptions about university requirements and expectations that are common for new students. Thus they intentionally seek to help new students form the habits that characterize successful students, which range from being in class (mentors call all nonattenders and encourage attendance) to speaking up in class. They call and e-mail students on a regular basis. They have their own office hours and encourage students to stop by. Most instructional teams mandate individual sessions with the students' mentors early in the semester, with repeated follow-up meetings as appropriate. In addition, the mentors on the instructional team for the first-year seminar often serve as the supplemental instruction leaders in the discipline-based courses with which the seminars are linked. Note that IUPUI's commitment to the inclusion of student mentors on the instructional teams is a direct result of the positive impact on academic achievement and persistence associated with student participation in supplemental instruction. Deanna Martin and her colleagues at the University of Missouri-Kansas City developed Supplemental Instruction (S.I.) as a model whereby students who succeed in a course continue as role models there, attending class and then offering out-of-class study sessions designed to help students master the material.

Technical Support

Society in general and the campus in particular now make extensive use of technology. Electronic mail and communities formed over listservs are increasingly a part of the work of those on campus, yet many students still arrive with little or no experience, particularly as the student body continues to include large proportions of returning adult and nontraditional students. We have therefore established listservs for each class, and students are taught to communicate through e-mail. Professors often make assignments on the listserv, and some professors engage class members in academic listserv chats throughout the semester. The students become comfortable with e-mail and have an easy way to make contact with one another and with all members of the instructional team.

Such electronic communication is especially important for commuter students whose lives are characterized by multiple commitments. As we review students' use of electronic mail, we see that some send messages early in the morning, and others only after midnight—obviously, these different schedules allow students the chance to determine when they can afford the time to communicate with each other and members of the instructional teams.

The instructional team, in its pilot phase, included a technical support person, but it quickly became clear that there were insufficient support persons to give individual attention to each class. In response, a small cadre of technical persons who do not have specific ties to individual sections now provide the necessary support.

Challenges

Curriculum

The first-year seminar, at the core of the learning communities, is a 1-2 credit course. It is an important means of involving the full-time faculty and of modeling collaborative learning in a context of intentionality and reflection, but it is only a single course. The challenge is to develop increased ties with disciplinary courses and to extend the instructional team approach across the curriculum. As the campus implements the general education principles approved by the faculty (the Principles of Undergraduate Learning), we must make certain that the course does not become a traditional “study skills” class. We must find means for the class to continue to be an exciting and transformational component of the work of the members of the instructional team, especially for the faculty. And we need to continue to refine the curriculum in view of changing students and changing conditions and to make sure that the implementation of the course is not a “one-time fix” for serving the entering students.

Resources

The learning community environment provides a safe place for students to adjust to college expectations surrounded by support. On average, twenty-five students are enrolled in each learning community section; the ratio of instructional team members to students is approximately 1:6—a ratio ensuring that each student receives significant individual attention. Students learn to rely on their instructional team members and, by extension, to trust that support will be available to them throughout their collegiate career. More importantly, they become comfortable with the campus environment and learn to seek support when needed. In other words, they learn how to function successfully on a college campus.

Nevertheless, the instructional team model strains university resources because it requires a significant commitment of personnel. Academic advisors and librarians have been able to serve on teams as their work has been redefined to include the instructional teams and as outside funding has provided modest support for such assignments. As we continue to increase the number of advisors and librarians participating on the teams (and, through the success of this program, on other teams), we face the challenge of identifying additional resources.

Faculty involvement in the course is central. One school now requires the course for its majors, and the course is included in faculty load. Other schools are using both part-of-load and overload arrangements in choosing faculty to serve on instructional teams. But the identification of appropriate rewards and recognition for continued and enhanced faculty leadership in the course is the most important challenge for the program.

Co-curricular Support

The instructional team members meet prior to the beginning of each semester to plan the curriculum for their learning community. Frequently, staff members from offices such as financial aid, career services, minority affairs, and personal counseling services, as well as many other campus service offices, are asked to make presentations to the learning community classes because the environment works well for introducing students to campus resources. Class presentations are built around explaining the services, and are frequently followed by class discussion. As a result, some offices report noticeable increases in requests for their services and enthusiastically endorse their own participation in the program. The expanding number of learning communities, however, is also expected to strain the personnel resources of IUPUI campus services offices. Although this is deemed a "good" problem in that students are making increased demand for university resources, the allocation of resources to support increased demand will be an issue for the campus.

Training and Preparation

New instructional team members join the program each semester. Over the last few years, participants experienced in the program have served as unofficial mentors to the new members. Members of the instructional teams, by role, are developing more formal support mechanisms; for example, faculty are considering a book of tips for new faculty. And, team members are developing job descriptions for their roles.

As these more formal mechanisms are developed, it is critical that the program not lose its focus on intentional and reflective practice. We do not ever want to move to a situation where we hand a new team member a "cookbook" and say "go, do good work."

Assessment

The campus has a strong emphasis on assessment of its initiatives. A full range of student surveys (entering students, continuing students, alumni), including evaluations of special activities (e.g., academic advising), is used to review student attitudes and perceptions for program participants as contrasted with nonparticipants. Borden and Rooney report on the preliminary data for the pilot phase of the learning communities project elsewhere in this issue. While increased retention rates associated with the program appear to be stable (especially for the most at-risk populations), it is important that we develop the full range of measures appropriate to the study of the program (e.g., impact on the advisor of being on a team). The most

important outcomes may well be not the impact on individual students (important as these appear to be) but rather on the transformation on institutional culture to one more focused on student learning that is practiced in an intentional and reflective way.

The University College

IUPUI has made a commitment to provide a supportive environment for all entering students. To accomplish that goal, the IUPUI Faculty Council approved the formation of the University College in spring 1997. The founding faculty (representing all schools at IUPUI) and the dean were appointed soon thereafter, with the first students to enter the new college in summer 1998. The founding faculty approved the following statement of mission and have invited other members of the college to join them in reviewing it as a draft:

University College is the academic unit at IUPUI that provides a common gateway to the academic programs available to entering students. University College coordinates existing university resources and develops new initiatives to promote academic excellence and enhance student persistence. It provides a setting where faculty, staff, and students share in the responsibility for making IUPUI a supportive and challenging environment for learning.

The faculty have stated that University College will achieve its mission through the following:

- Promotion of student learning
- Focus on individual student success
- Establishment of its own traditions and recognition of accomplishments
- Provision of a quality first-year experience
- Development of strong connections with the degree-granting units
- Commitment to faculty and staff development
- Creation of a community that values diversity
- Implementation of collaborative governance built on individual responsibility
- Commitment to intentional reflection and assessment

As part of its mission, University College, in cooperation with the fifteen undergraduate schools, oversees the learning community program. Collaboration, a primary focus of the instructional teams, is thus at the heart of the work of the college.

The college has also stressed the importance of continuous learning and of continuous assessment, and a First-year Studies Committee was established as a standing committee of University College and charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Learning Community Program. The collaborative focus of University College is also reflected in the composition of the committee: librarians, academic advisors, and administrators serve along with faculty members as active participants.

Conclusions

The development, implementation, and assessment of the instructional team model are central to learning communities at IUPUI. What are the outcomes to date of persons in different roles working together in this way?

We have made the activities of the different roles "public" activities. Boyer (1994) argued that we needed to make teaching a public activity, and, as members of our instructional teams have worked together, we have made the work of advisors, librarians, and student mentors public activities as well. Members of the teams must articulate their roles and their unique contributions as they develop the syllabus and teach the seminar. The result is that not only do students come to appreciate the contributions and resources each instructional team member brings to the class, but the members themselves come to appreciate the varying roles they serve on campus. We are reducing the unhelpful barriers between faculty and advisors. Librarians are no longer persons to whom faculty send students. Advisors are viewed as making contributions well beyond filling in the boxes on a student's schedule. Especially important is the recognition of the role of the student mentor. While descriptions of the "student as customer" may be helpful in some contexts, the focus on student mentors as partners in helping other students increase their commitment to learning helps us move forward as a campus that stresses learning. One faculty member commented on his surprise that there was teaching outside the classroom or that anyone other than faculty did any teaching. The focus on student learning has been instrumental in developing an understanding of the role that everyone on campus plays in working with students. A related, serendipitous, outcome is that those participating on the teams have increased their informal networks for supporting students. On a large campus, this "structural" means of providing increased networks to serve students is receiving attention as a means of doing just that.

Full-time faculty have had limited direct experience with entering students at IUPUI; the majority of the instruction is delivered by part-time faculty. Yet, faculty do control the culture and articulate the expectations for the undergraduate curriculum. In a delineation of principles for effective general education programs, the Association of American Colleges (1994) stated that "faculty often know little about student lives today. Student resistance to learning (that faculty often sense) may not be simple negativism, but may represent an expression by students that the classroom is not related to their lives" (p. 23). The argument is not that we should move to a 1960's-era "relevance," but, rather, that we need to find means to engage students actively in their learning. Faculty anecdotes about students' hidden strengths as they have met together to plan the first-year seminars suggest that this intensive involvement with entering students plays an important role in supporting their inherent interest in improving the curriculum by providing up-front data on the students and their perceptions. One faculty member noted that she now sees her role in part as identifying a student's strengths and seeking to build upon them. In one case, it might be a strong commitment to using the computer. In another, it might be the ability to organize group projects in class. Such attention to the individual student

makes it more likely that the student will be able to build on the strengths he or she brings to university study.

The learning community program was designed to support student learning, yet faculty, staff, and students report that they have found the program to be an important form of faculty, staff, and student development. There is no “automatic pilot” for implementing instructional teams in the first-year seminars in learning communities. This is different work. We have to articulate our roles. Since we are doing something different, we have found ourselves more intentional in our work. We can’t just do what we “do,” but, rather, must tell the team what we’re doing and articulate our efforts with those of others. We have moved to what Schön (1983) called “reflection-in action” (p. 50). We argue that Schön’s words characterize the coming together of persons working across roles on the instructional teams: “As the professional moves toward new competencies, he gives up some familiar sources of satisfaction and opens...to new ones...When practice is a repetitive administration of techniques to the same kinds of problems, the practitioner may look to leisure as a source of relief.” Members of instructional teams, by the context in which they work, may well become what Schön calls “researchers-in-practice.” The “practice itself is a source of renewal” (p. 299). Faculty, advisors, librarians, and student mentors are working in a context where they interact collaboratively to learn how to help students become more oriented to learning.

Like many urban, commuter campuses, IUPUI has long been noted for an absence of student activities. Not that we have not tried traditional means for involving students, but our efforts have too often been characterized as “parties where no one came.” The first-year seminars are now taught, for the most part, in a newly renovated building that houses the University College, the academic home for IUPUI’s entering students. Classrooms in the building are the sites for the courses. A “collaboratory” with twenty personal computers is the site where students learn to use technology. The University Library is connected by an interior walkway to the University College. The new space includes all supplemental instruction programs and a large proportion of departmentally based tutoring programs. While formal studies on the use of the space have not been conducted, it is clear that students are using all of it in this 57,000 square-foot building and that the use is primarily learning-centered (judging from the numbers of books open and students conversing about their work). A student culture centered on learning is being developed, primarily as a function of the first year seminar in the learning communities in which students are introduced to the building and its facilities.

Hallowell argues that “we need to make our campuses places of intentional connection. Students are ready and eager; we need to make the time and the structures. College can’t become home, but it can become a place where the heart heats up with the importance of making the human connection count” (p. 22). The learning communities, centering on the first-year seminar taught by an instructional team, are increasing the focus on student learning and on making those human connections count.

Suggested Readings

- Association of American Colleges, "Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs" (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1994).
- Boyer, E. L., "How Do We Talk about Higher Education's Relationship to the Schools?" *Metropolitan Universities* 5(2, 1994): 7.
- Hallowell, E. M., "I Am Here Because They Were There." *About Campus*, 16-22. (1997).
- Martin, D., Blanc, R., & DeBuhr, L., *Supplemental Instruction: A Model for Student Academic Support* (Kansas City: University of Missouri, 1983).
- Schön, D. A., *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education. *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1984).