



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
 LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM ACTION PLAN
 JUNE 2010- JUNE 2012

The NSILC Team will build upon UNCG's current learning community initiatives to plan and implement a campus-wide program of Learning Communities (LCs). Among other campus initiatives, the LC program will assist in meeting the following goals: improve retention and persistence rates above the mandated state average, create and support integrative learning practices and develop high impact pedagogy that will engage student learning for all undergraduate students.

Learning Communities at UNCG are a curricular initiative intended to enhance student success (learning, development, retention and persistence). An LC brings faculty, students and staff together in a focused academic community organized around a thematic central thread that is intellectually attractive to interested students, faculty and other members of the community (UNCG and beyond). An LC requires academic credit bearing courses and formal credited learning that are related to the organizing theme and relevant for the student population for whom the LC is intended. Learning Communities intentionally encourage integration of learning across courses and connect curricular and co-curricular learning in substantive ways designed to enhance both. An LC is led by a faculty member or a team of faculty and staff that work to develop close supportive relationships and collaboration among the members of the LC grounded in their common academic pursuit. A Learning Community may be centered in a residential setting, and as such, become a Living-Learning Community (LLC) where engaged faculty, staff and students also maintain an enhanced co-curricular and social program.

PART ONE: INCREASING STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

A. Clarify goals/program focus

Steps:

As mandated by the UNC General Administration, our goal is to contribute toward increasing the freshman to sophomore retention rate from 76.5 to 80%, four-year graduation rate from 29 to 34% and six-year graduation rate from 53 to 60% by fall 2013. Under the direction of the Chancellor and Provost, LCs for all first-year students will be established by 2014. Further, to the extent possible, we create LCs for all undergraduate students. We will create a comprehensive program of LCs, some of which will target those UNCG student groups which have been identified as having low retention and persistence rates. Other LCs will be topically-based, integrating students' needs and faculty interests.

Timeline:

2010 – Fall 2013

Team lead:

Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Strategic Plan 3.3 Committee (Strategic Plan Goal 3.3 calls for bringing LCs to all first-year students and to as many other students as possible.)

B. Collaborate to accomplish student persistence and achievement goals

Strengthen learning-oriented collaborations with administrators;

Steps:

The Chancellor and Provost are committed to efforts to improve student persistence and achievement goals and have mandated establishment of LCs for all first year students by 2014, and to the extent possible, for all undergraduates. The Provost has worked with the Deans Council to establish implementation plans for these LCs. The Deans will lead the efforts in their Units. An initial Request for Proposals (RFPs, see Appendix A) for the establishment of new LCs has been sent to the Deans to disseminate. Faculty will be encouraged to submit proposals for 2011 by September 2010. Multiple dates will be set to review proposals submitted by faculty. As LCs are approved, collaborations will have to occur between Student Affairs, Auxiliary Services, and Academic Affairs.

Timeline:

2010 to 2014

Team lead:

Unit Deans and the Dean for Undergraduate Studies

Strengthen learning-oriented collaborations with student support services staff:

Steps:

In the spring 2010, the separate divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs were restructured and brought together organizationally under the Office of the Provost. This new structure offers the opportunities for more learning-oriented collaborations with student support services staff and with Student Affairs units (e.g. Housing and Residence Life, Office of Multicultural Affairs, and Office of Leadership and Service Learning). A Committee is being established to implement Strategic Plan Goal 3.6, which calls for the collaboration of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to enhance co-curricular learning. This Committee will be activated in the fall of 2010. The NSILC Team recommends that either Committee 3.3 or a Director of Learning Communities will meet together with Committee 3.6 regularly to develop specific plans to assure links between curricular and co-curricular learning.

In addition, Housing & Residence Life is aggressively incorporating and reconfiguring public spaces in the residence halls to support expanded possibilities for teaching, learning and academic support. As the buildings are renovated, state funding is being explored to create academic spaces and mixed-use spaces in the residence halls to support the University's initiatives on learning communities. This type of space includes seminar/classroom/meeting space, administrative support space for a particular living/learning community, faculty office space and general gathering space for the learning community participants. Further, new and renovated residence halls will have faculty and staff apartments. Ideally, there is also space for academic support service staff to hold office hours in the residence halls to provide additional resources for the participants.

We expect a culture of collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will develop with time. Already, an RFP LC Workshop coordinated by the two divisions is being developed to assist all faculty members interested in LCs, including those who have submitted or plan to submit proposals to develop LCs. This workshop will assist faculty in taking the first steps in planning their LCs. As LCs are approved and as part of the workshop, faculty will meet with student support services staff to identify collaborative partnerships which promote both curricular and co-curricular learning. Possible partnerships could include Housing and Residence Life, the Student Success Center, Academic Advising, as well as other Student Affairs units listed above.

Timeline:

Spring 2010 - 2014

Team lead:

Vice- Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies

C. Integrate infrastructure—the learning community coordinating committee/coordinator

Steps:

The UNCG Deans Council has approved the appointment of a Director of Learning Communities. Final approval of this position is expected by the fall of 2010. A proposed Advisory Committee will offer guidance to this office. The committee will be comprised of some of the Strategic Planning 3.3 Committee, the Director of Institutional Research, among others. The Chancellor and Provost have committed to providing permanent ongoing funding to support faculty involvement and ongoing growth of the LC program. The NSILC Team recommends that the senior leadership team consider making the expansion of the LCs the focus of UNCG's upcoming SACs Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The Director will investigate the possibility of additional external funding. A plan needs to be developed for the support of these new LCs from student support services, Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs

Timeline:

2010-2011 Academic Year

Team lead:

Dean of Undergraduate Studies

PART TWO: PROMOTING INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

A. Strengthen orientation towards integrative learning

Steps:

1. UNCG's Strategic Plan 2009-2014

Promoting integrative learning is one of the primary goals of UNCG's decision to undertake a very significant enhancement and expansion of its existing LCs in our new Strategic Plan 2009-2014. The Strategic Plan Goal 3.3 calls for all first time students to be enrolled in an LC explicitly for the purpose of promoting integrative learning across courses. Realization of this goal entails expanding first year student

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enrollment in our current LC offerings from approximately 200 students to include approximately 3500 new, first time students. In addition, the Chancellor has recently broadened the original Strategic Plan goal to include efforts to expand LCs and Living/Learning Communities for upper class students as well.

2. The NSILC Team

The NSILC Team was formed and an application submitted to attend the Institute as a first step toward realizing this Strategic Plan goal. It is our intention that the NSILC Team acquire the understanding of integrative learning and familiarity with its concrete practice (e.g. the heuristic, essays and faculty provided by the NSILC) necessary for them to become an effective resource group that has a well developed and common understanding of integrative learning theory and practice and that will enable them to effectively educate others on our campus as we roll out our expanded LC program. We will request that Faculty Senate Forum be dedicated to integrated learning in LCs. This report will be shared with the 3.3 Committee and the Provost.

3. New LC Request For Proposal Process (RFP)

The Strategic Plan 3.3 Committee tasked with implementing the LC goal has already developed and released a new proposal form (see attached) that explicitly requires faculty and staff teams to identify and explain the assignments they will use to integrate learning across the courses required for their LC as well as explaining how they will integrate learning between formal course work and co-curricular activities. The NSILC Team as a resource group to meet with faculty and staff teams submitting proposals and to assist them in developing their plans, including the inclusion of integrative learning goals and assignments.

4. LC “how to” Workshops on Integrative Learning

In collaboration with our University Teaching and Learning Center whose Director is a member of the NSILC Team, the Team will pilot a workshop for early August 2010 that will include a session on integrative learning for faculty and staff teams developing new LCs. This workshop will be further developed and offered at least each semester to expand faculty awareness, development, and practice of integrative learning.

5. Learning Communities Luncheon/Reception for Faculty

The NSILC Team will identify five to ten faculty from each Academic Unit who are currently involved in LCs, currently using integrated learning practices or may have an interest in becoming involved in the programs and invite them to informational luncheons or receptions. These events should feature the work of those faculty and students already involved in LCs and highlight faculty work and student interest as what drives the learning community development. These receptions may result in the creation of Faculty Learning Communities on such topics as Student Learning Communities, high-impact pedagogies, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. These luncheons and receptions would be co-directed by the Director of Learning Communities and the Director of the University Teaching and Learning Center.

6. Learning Communities Luncheon/Reception for Student Affairs and Advising Staff

Similar to the faculty luncheons/receptions, forums will also be held for staff involved in co-curricular education. These events should feature the work of those staff and students already involved in LCs and highlight what drives learning community development. The intent of these and similar efforts is to encourage Student Affairs staff as well as faculty to develop and propose ideas for learning communities, taking an active role in the ongoing development of UNCG’s comprehensive LC program.

7. Faculty and Staff Senate Forums

Arrange to provide informational presentations to the faculty and staff senates.

We will continue to strengthen our focus on integrative learning as we implement the steps described above and reflect together on our efforts in light of feedback from faculty and staff who are developing new LC proposals. We see this effort as an ongoing and evolving process of learning and refinement.

Timeline:

May 2009 -- Strategic Plan Adopted
November 2009 -- NSILC application submitted
November 2009 -- LC Implementation Committee charged
May 2010 -- RFP process endorsed by Deans Council
June 2010 -- Call for new LC proposals
June 2010 -- NSILC
August 2010 -- How to Workshops Implemented and creation of proposed LC Director position
September 2010 -- First new LC proposals submitted
October -- May new LC teams consult with NSILC Team members on proposals
August 2011 -- First new LCs' launch

Team lead:

Dean of Undergraduate Studies (the Team Leader) who is also co-chair of the Strategic Plan 3.3 Committee.

B. Gather evidence of integrative learning

Steps:

1. Create Director of Learning Communities position
2. Staff a "Learning Community Office" under the new Director of LCs
3. Form an Advisory Council for the LC Director with broad campus representation
4. Assign ongoing task of monitoring integrative learning, collecting evidence of its practice and assessment of the extent to which specific assignments, courses and LCs achieve the goal of integrative learning to the new LC Office.

Timeline:

August 2010 -- Create Director of LC's position and LC Office under the Dean of Undergraduate Studies
September 2010 -- May 2011 develop and approve new LC proposals
August 2011 -- Launch of new LCs
September 2011 -- December 2011 collect course syllabi and student work product and portfolios from new LC faculty coordinators
Spring 2012 -- Review and assess student work and recommend enhancement to integrative learning practices

Team lead:

Primary responsibility will rest with the Director of Learning Communities under the oversight of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and with input from the planned Advisory Council.

C. Assess integrative learning

Steps:

1. Develop additional assessment strategies specific to our campus under the direction of a NSILC Team member who has professional expertise in assessment and measurement.
2. Collect samples of LC course syllabi, assignment rubrics and student work product and assess using NSILC guidelines and practices as well as rubrics developed by a Team member
3. Review and analyze
4. Publish findings on LC web site and to faculty coordinators of LCs

Timeline:

Late fall 2011 -- Collect student work product and develop additional campus specific assessment rubrics
Winter 2011 and Early spring 2012 -- Review and analyze student work product
Spring 2012 -- Publish results on LC Web page and to faculty LC coordinators

Team lead:

Director of Learning Communities and other Team members as designated.

PART THREE: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

A. Examine/strengthen existing classroom practices in learning communities

Steps:

In order for faculty to build their repertoire of effective pedagogical practices, we will:

1. Coordinate with the Director of Assessment to develop an assessment plan and instruments for high-impact pedagogical practices.
2. Develop/integrate a High Impact Practice Matrix. The Matrix will be used by LC faculty to identify relevant practices used in their classes/programs and to provide the supporting evidence.
3. Ensure that these activities are appropriately aligned with those undertaken by the Institutional Effectiveness Committee and the Office of Planning and Assessment.
4. Coordinate with the Office of Planning and Assessment to design and deliver a series of workshops that familiarize LC faculty with diverse and appropriate assessments methods/instruments.
5. Explore existing instruments for faculty self-assessment, including the instrument provided by the institute, to be adapted for our faculty to reflect on their own classroom practices.

Timeline:

We plan to design and create the instruments over the 2010-2011 academic year with the goal of piloting it in fall 2011. Findings from the pilot will be used to revise the instruments and our practices.

Team lead:

Initially, the Strategic Plan Goal 3.3 Committee will take the lead on this step, with the expectation that responsibility will transition to the proposed Director of Learning Communities.

B. Plan professional development (using faculty inquiry to enhance student learning)

Steps:

In order to strengthen professional and faculty development, we will:

1. Develop a robust scholarship of teaching and learning presence in LCs. This could be linked to the expanded community-engaged scholarship, which requires an expansion of centralized faculty development resources. This initiative necessitates securing faculty development resources from UNCG administration and external sources.
2. Target the 2011 Lilly Conference to focus on issues of LCs and high-impact pedagogy. Incoming Learning Communities Faculty will participate in the conference.
3. Investigate other Learning Community conference opportunities, such as the National Learning Community Conference 2010
4. Expand the RFP LC Workshop to encompass an ongoing faculty workshop series, covering issues such as integrative learning and assignments, instructional technology, and collaborative learning.

Timeline:

This expanded faculty development plan will be implemented in July 2011.

Team lead:

The Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Learning Communities and the Director of the University Teaching and Learning Center will take the lead on creating and implementing this faculty development plan.

C. Assess students' experiences of learning in learning community classes and programs

Steps:

The documentation of student learning outcomes needs to attend to holistic learning and student empowerment. This entails a strong focus on students' intellectual, social, and emotional development. The process entails the following:

1. Developing clear statements of student learning outcomes to provide faculty, staff, and students involved a common understanding of the process and the goals to be attained. Student learning outcome statements need to attend to deep learning as discussed in the AAC&U (2007) *College Learning in the New Global Century*, i.e., integrative learning, personal and social responsibility, intellectual and practical skills, and knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural work. LCs should emphasize disciplinary learning, interdisciplinary connections, and co-curricular integration.
2. As part of the learning outcome statements, consider the questions delineated in the *NSILC Discussion Guide for Developing a Two-Year Learning Community Program Action Plan* (see Appendix B). These questions focus on key issues in terms of intentionally designed integrative assessments.

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3. Operationalize the student learning outcome statements in terms of specific student knowledge, skills and abilities that will manifest that students have met these purposes.
4. The specific student knowledge, skills, and abilities will be used to develop the assessment instruments.
5. A variety of assessment programs need to be developed to accommodate diverse needs. These assessments include course embedded assessments and formative assessments to help enhance the teaching and learning process as well as learning outcomes (outcome behaviors) and summative assessments to provide a macro view of teaching, learning, and course/program effectiveness for accountability purposes.
6. Both quantitative and qualitative methods/data will be useful to help better document students' holistic learning, engagement, and empowerment. Additionally, direct and indirect measures, as well as performance assessments (e.g., essays, presentations, exhibitions, performances, demonstrations, reflective journals (daily/weekly); and capstone experiences will be used to document students' holistic learning.
7. A portfolio (possibly electronic) that thoughtfully integrates the various student assessments and projects and connects with delineated learning standards should be considered as the mechanism for integrating the documentation of student learning across courses and years of study.
8. In addition to in-house assessments, it is important to employ nationally recognized and widely-used instruments such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE enables us to obtain nationally-normative information with regard to five benchmarks: "level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment."
9. Code LC students in order to collect retention data, persistence data, and GPA reports each semester.

Timeline:

Development of Outcomes will begin fall 2010

Development of Assessment Tools will begin spring 2011

Data collection begins fall 2011, and is on-going

Team lead:

Director of LCs, in collaboration with Office of Planning and Assessment and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee

PS (Ideas to be considered when the Team returns to campus)

1. Putting a student on the Advisory Committee
2. Grants for LC Course Development and other activities.
3. Include "speed dating" activities in workshops
4. Include steps to involve Orientation and Admissions
5. Include a step to provide necessary web presence and support
6. Explore the use of data from the Collegiate Learning Assessment to gain longitudinal information for students involved in LCs.