

Learning Communities Master Syllabus

Catalog Description

Each section of the college seminar is thematically linked to another required course in the Core Curriculum. These linked courses comprise an academic learning community that brings first-year students together for an extended intellectual experience. By sharing two courses, students can more deeply explore a provocative topic, more quickly forge relationships with one another, and more fully develop productive academic habits, including making thoughtful connections among courses, collaborating with peers, and interacting with professors.

Learning Outcomes

A student successfully completing a learning community will be able to

1. Articulate connections between courses, specifically how learning in one course helped to deepen engagement with and understanding of learning in another course
2. Demonstrate the ability to reflect upon learning, showing how new knowledge and experiences have affected beliefs, attitudes, opinions, or values.

Intangibles / Aspirations / Additional Core Outcomes to be Addressed

Teaching Methods and Assessment

The success of the learning communities will largely depend on the willingness of faculty to work collaboratively and to integrate a substantial portion of their courses. In order for two courses to function as a learning community, the following criteria must be met:

1. Intentional and substantive focus on shared thematic content. A significant portion (at least 20 percent) of the companion course in a learning community must focus on the same theme addressed in the college seminar section to which the companion course is linked. If, for example, a college seminar section focuses on the quest for identity, the companion course must also address the topic of identity by means established by the participating instructors. Such means should be understood expansively. In a highly integrated learning community, both courses might be driven by a single, shared list of operative questions that inform readings, discussions, and assignments. At a minimum, the companion course might include three weeks of readings that examine the concept of identity from a discipline-specific perspective (psychological, literary, or historical, for example). Additionally, each course in the learning community might include an assignment that takes several weeks to complete and that draws on material from the other course. Instructors might assign reflection essays in which students synthesize content from both courses and demonstrate their growing understanding of the topic.

These are just a few possible methods. The key point is that the content of each course, while distinct (with separate syllabi), should be linked in a manner and amount that allows students to make connections between classes and to see how significant questions and issues are approached from various perspectives.

2. Instructor visits. At least twice in the semester, each instructor must attend meetings of the other course. Such visits will allow instructors to learn from one another; gain deeper insight into the content, assumptions and methods of another discipline; discover possibilities for additional collaboration; participate with students in the learning process; and assess how students are performing in one another's courses. Instructors are strongly encouraged to communicate with one another throughout the semester to evaluate progress and share observations and ideas.

Instructors may wish to add the following:

3. Co-curricular activities. Instructors may wish, in the spirit of integrated learning, to require students to participate in cultural and social activities pertinent to the shared topic of the learning community. Public lectures, theatre productions, films, and field trips to museums, galleries, and historical sites might be especially relevant to the content of both courses. Social gatherings, dinners and non-academic events provide opportunities for classmates and their instructors (and perhaps the instructors' families) to communicate across boundaries of class, race, gender and age in informal settings. Such experiences might help combat the feelings of loneliness and isolation common among first-year students.

Texts

Additional Information / Resources for Instructors

Courses