LEARNING COMMUNITIES AD HOC TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

December 12, 2022

Committee Members:

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the culmination of work completed by the ad hoc task force for the charge of Scaling Learning Communities at CSUCI for the AY2023/34. The report provides an overview of the process for this work and the final recommendations for consideration in scaling of the learning communities to reach the target of 70% enrollment of first-time, full-time students (FTFT) in Fall 2023. The charge for this call can be found in Appendix A.

To provide context to this work, the Learning Communities for the AY22/23 includes 311 enrolled students at the beginning of the Fall 2022 semester. This includes 12 learning/living communities for a total of 19 cohorts (some cohorts have multiple sections), and there are 12 to 20 students enrolled in each cohort. This is an increase of 45% from Fall 2021, when there were 9 learning/living communities for a total of 12 cohorts, total of 140 students. If the Fall 2023 incoming first time freshman class is 600 students, the goal is to enroll 420 of these students into a learning community. This would increase participation by about 35% or 109 students over the current year. In the current year, the Learning Communities team recruited and trained 19 embedded peer mentors (EPM). The goal was to hire 25 EPMs (anticipating 350-400 students in LCs), but they were not able to fill all open positions. The EPM team is central to the Learning Community programming. You will find this highlighted in the recommendations in this report.

COMMITTEE

When determining the membership of the committee the following factors were considered:

1) Size of committee to allow for constructive contributions within a time timeframe of 5 weeks.
2) Representation to include staff, faculty, and administration.
3) Ability to focus on the charge for the committee work with full awareness of other program elements that require close collaboration but are outside of the scope of this charge.

The work of the Learning Communities is both collaborative and multifaceted. Recognizing the role of advising, financial aid, admissions, the Registrar, and department chairs as some of the colleagues who are critical to this work, the work of the committee was focused on LC recruitment, enrollment and programming as managed within the Learning Communities team within HIPEE and Residential Housing.

The AVP of HIPEE invited Marie Francois (LC Faculty Director), Tiffany Elliott (LC Coordinator), Gary Gordon, Venessa Griffith, HyeSun Lee and Susan Lefevre to join the committee.

Additionally, a call to the faculty was shared through the Senate to invite faculty participation. Geoff Buhl and Dennis Downey responded to the call and joined the committee.

With a total of 9 committee members and a timeline of approximately 5 weeks, committee members were assigned to subgroups that aligned with the charge of the committee. Committee members indicated their subgroup preferences and the committee organized as follows:

1. LC/LLC Cohort Criteria, Proposal and Approval Process (Dennis & Geoff)
2. LC/LLC EPM Considerations (Susan & HyeSun)
3. LC/LLC Programming & Events (Gary/Venessa & Tiffany)
4. LC/LLC Recruitment, Enrollment & Retention (Marie & Veronica/Tiffany)

PROCESS

A OneDrive folder was created to organize the work of the task force. The contents included the committee charge, available data and literature, past committee reports, and folders for each subgroup to facilitate the submission of their assigned tasks.

The first task assigned to the subgroups was to meet and discuss their specific content area. A document with guiding questions (Appendix B) was provided to each group to facilitate the discussion. The ability to convene all committee members for each subgroup meeting was not possible given the timeframe. Thus, each group sent out Outlook invites to allow for participation from other committee members optionally. Notes from the meetings were uploaded to the drive.

The next task assigned to subgroups was to meet and provide recommendations based on the available data and their notes from their prior subgroup meeting. A template was provided to guide the formatting of the recommendations (Appendix C). These documents were also uploaded to assigned folders and available for fellow committee members to access and review.

Finally, the AVP of HIPEE compiled this report utilizing the information shared in these documents and review of committee members.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations put forth by each sub-group and reviewed by committee members are provided below and aligned with each area of the committee charge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COHORT PROPOSAL & APPROVAL PROCESS

Recommendation	Assumptions/Considerations	Data/Literature Reference
Learning community proposals should clearly indicate which course will have an Embedded Peer Mentor, and that course should be scheduled with enough contact time for the EPM's activities	This assumes that EPMs will continue to play an important role in LCs, and the training and development of both EPMs and faculty will be ongoing. Specifically, a 3-unit course needs to be 2 hours lecture and 2 hours activity for a total of 4 contact hours per week. A 2+2 course = 3.3 WTU workload for faculty. Changing an existing 3-unit course that is not 2+2 would need to go through Curriculum Committee approval (at least a year long process), so not possible for F23.	Peer mentors need significant and ongoing development and training, as do instructional faculty working with mentors
Enrollment Management should have a significant share of the responsibility in identifying students interests in Learning Communities and recruiting students into Learning Communities		Learning communities need to be built into the core functions of the university
Themes must align with broader campus priorities	LCs/LLCs must be integrated into broader campus planning and priorities; to do so, we need to develop broader campus priorities – and then make proposers aware of them. If LCs/LLCs are isolated programmatically, they will not have the effect that we desire and need.	
LC/LLC leadership must be actively involved in cultivating themes and partners.	In order to ensure that we have strong themes, and strong LC/LLC programming, LC/LLC leadership needs to take a very active role in cultivating capacity, and steering proposals toward productive themes and organization. We cannot simply passively disseminate a CFP and wait to see what comes back – but must be actively involved in	

	cultivating proposals that will best serve our students (through informational and developmental workshops, working with proposers to develop their proposals, etc.).	
LC/LLC coordination must be led by an ongoing committee tasked with that charge, including multiple elected faculty members.	LC/LLC coordination, done well, will require multiple ongoing tasks – faculty development, cultivation of proposals, review of proposals, assessment of outcomes, etc. Those tasks must be led by a group – including faculty – who have formal standing, and who have representatives from all necessary coordinating campus units.	
Effective scheduling (including block scheduling) for LCs/LLCs must be part of a broader fundamental reconfiguration of how scheduling is accomplished on campus.	Currently, scheduling is completely decentralized to programs, with no coordination. • We need to rethink and reorganize our scheduling practices to a much more coordinated, partially centralized, and possibly sequenced process. (For example, we might want to have spots scheduled for LCs and LLCs first; perhaps have GE classes next; and then have programs schedule for majors to articulate with that structure where necessary.) • We will also need to get much more accurate information to chairs – in part, by ensuring that a minimum of 85% of our students use the degree planner. • We need to provide more developmental training and logic about scheduling to chairs. In short, we're doing very little well in the area of scheduling – and we need to get this working well if LCs and LLCs are going to be scheduled effectively.	

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EPM CONSIDERATIONS

Recommendation	Suggested Modifications	Assumptions/Considerations
Ratio of EPM to Students: No higher than 2 to 40-50	**Current Practice:** Ratio of EPM to Students: 2 to 35-40 **High-Impact Practice:** Ratio of EPM to Students: 2 to 25-30	**Rationale:** While there is an understandable call to investigate the current ratio, it is essential that EPM lead groups that remain small enough to build relationships that support academic performance and success. A high ratio of mentor to mentee can create 'negative minimalist mentoring' versus a 'motivating master mentoring' scenario thus, negating possible positive outcomes. At best, we would create an 'informatory standard mentoring' that does not serve students in the best of situations much less students in our current and future cohorts.
Consider having fewer required DIGS (Dolphin Interest Groups) throughout the semester but be extremely strategic in activities and Interventions. Consider providing a grade three times across the semester for DIGs instead of once at the end.	**Current Practice:** Bi-weekly throughout the semester on a regular schedule. **High-Impact Practice:** Consistent and regular meetings with EPMs in small groups from the class throughout the semester on a regular schedule is the generalized best practice.	**Rationale:** Both students and EPMs seemed overwhelmed with the management of their schedules. In addition, some EPMs reported low turnouts to DIGS. EPMs also reported interacting and trying to support students with a growing number of psychosocial issues that were in turn taxing for the EPM. EPMs also reported many successful referrals to CAPS. Perhaps freeing the EPMs' time to deal directly with students in areas of need might prove useful in helping students to feel more integrated and connected to the university, which could reinforce their persistence toward graduating.

If LC/LLCs reside in each program, EPM training should be tailored towards their discipline. Compared to workshops where all EPMs were trained based on a unified program operated by the Experiential Program, new training programs should involve faculty members from each program so that EPMs can meet the corresponding program's needs. *Proposed plan (moving from UNIV to each program)*	**Current Practice:** EPMs are trained through one unified program/workshops **Modification of Current Practice:** There is a need for additional training which reflects each major's needs. For example, the needs for the Math Program are different from those for the Psychology Program. Therefore, the additional training program should involve faculty from each program so that EPMs can be trained based on the needs of the program that the EPMs work for.	Rationale: As we discussed during the meeting, EPMs should be trained to provide more social support to help students stay in their major and succeed in their academic performance. The major difference between EPMs and LRC embedded tutors is that LRC tutors are mostly course specific (e.g., math skills, English composition), whereas EPMs provide more social/emotional support for the students that is not addressed by the embedded tutors. Considering that the morale and students' sense of belonging are low, the role of EPMs is crucial to enhance students' retention, while facilitating students' academic success. Additionally, this would not apply for cohorts that are not major specific. Thus, training for these EPMs would need to be considered
To maintain the consistency of EPM training across different programs/majors and ensure the quality of the EPM role in each course, EPM training programs should include more time for EPMs to build activities. *Proposed plan (moving from UNIV to each program)*	**Current Practice:** The current training requires EPMs to prepare 4-8 weeks of activities. **Modification of Current Practice:** It would be better to require EPMs to prepare 12-16 weeks of activities. This modification will also provide more quality control to review their plans during training. In addition, EPMs and faculty can engage before the semester starts while preparing activity plans for the entire semester. Finally, this will minimize EPM's prep time during the semester, thus improving the retention of EPMs. Retain the opportunity to make changes as the semester unfolds.	**Rationale:** Considering that the low retention rate of EPMs was related to time spent preparing activities during the semester because their time commitment required for the preparation of in-class EPM activities was more than what they expected. As a result, it became challenging for them to simultaneously manage their own classes and EPM work, so they decided to resign. Therefore, it would be useful to frontload the workload in the training, so they do not have to spend so much time prepping outside of the training. This would require more time in training.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING & EVENTS

Recommendation	Assumptions/Considerations	Data/Literature Reference
Combine welcome events for learning community cohorts with student convocation to maximize resources and increase participation.	Offering student course credit to increase participation needs faculty approval. Collaboration with convocation committee for a space to allow LCs to convene (pre and/or post ceremony)	Low student participation rate at welcome event for cost of event (35 student attendees at Learning Community Welcome Reception - $39.03 cost per student)
Have four main trips a semester, related to the 4 Mission Pillars. In total, one event and one trip per month. The events can be collaborations between various departments.	Need faculty buy-in and participation to create events that are meaningful across all LCs within one Mission Pillar. Begin targeted planning in June and continue planning in August. Maintain events/activities that have had consistent buy-in and modify events/activities for LCs with low faculty/student participation history.	Some LCs (such as Health Care, Michele Serros & Pinkard LLCs) have historically had high faculty buy-in and student participation, whereas some other LCs have had little to no faculty buy-in (such as Discovery LCs) and student participation in events. "Done right, they must be more than clusters of linked classes; the involved faculty members must work together to create an "integrated educational experience," collaborating on "defining learning outcomes, selecting content and readings, and designing assignments and assessments." Lederman 2020
Invest in events/activities that are more interactive as opposed to passive.	Pursue events that require active participation from students (such as the Tiramisu event, vs. watching a movie and having a discussion).	Tiramisu event had 30 attendees, whereas our Golden Dolphins Movie Night had 17 visits, but only 7 stay and watch the movie.
Incorporate Academic Success driven events.	1 in August/Sept & 1 during midterms/second half of the semester – focused on topics such as study skills, test anxiety, registration, transitioning to the second semester, etc. Want to try and collaborate with campus resources to address low staff capacity.	Most, if not all, of the events that we have done have been focused on the theme of a particular community or course, but academic success has only been addressed in the classroom and by EPMs. Need to extend this message beyond the classroom.

Recommendation	Assumptions/Considerations	Rationale
Recruitment: Have EPMs visit VC high school classes to promote LCs.	EPMs are great ambassadors as near-peers and can talk about sense of belonging and academic supports.	Recent EM marketing study showed limited awareness among high school students and counselors of opportunities at CI.
Recruitment: Include LC Interest information in EM "Choose Your Pod" survey. Highlight alignments with majors and thematic interests.	Limit the number of surveys students get – one stop shop. Also, include a "text updates about IC/LLCs" link to the comprehensive survey. If we can identify on the survey and provide suggestions for which communities best align with majors, then that would help to decrease the back and forth across the summer.	First Gen students are not likely to do multiple surveys.
Recruitment & Enrollment: Build LC Interest Survey so students must rank top 3 choices (drag and drop), not just one, as a mandatory step to continue with the survey. Affirmative language that doesn't suggest it is optional.	Back and forth communications is time-consuming – students should assume placement in chosen LCs, space permitting	We had students finish the survey choosing only one LC, choosing all, or not choosing any.
Recruitment, Enrollment & Retention: Buy-in with program chairs/faculty about which LCs best suit their majors (whether there are only a few and when there are perhaps full cohorts for an LC).	Buy-in needed whether there are only a few and when there are perhaps full cohorts for an LC. Timing is key here – if LC schedules and general schedules are built at the same time (I.e., in February), there is no time to check for conflicts for required courses for all majors. LC linked-course schedules should be done in the fall.	In the past, some chairs have actively discouraged LC participation.
Enrollment and Retention: Put link to sign up for text updates on the LC Interest Survey (or LC portion of the general enrollment management survey - "Choose Your Pod?"). Closer to the semester, send out another reminder for text messages. Or some automatic enrollment in text messaging.	Enrollment Management should continue to provide support in avoiding melt. Students are more likely to read and respond to text messaging than email.	When we send emails to students, we do not always receive timely responses. We have had to remind students to check for information.
Recruitment, Enrollment and Retention: Keeping the welcome postcards with QR codes in their LC newsletters.	This year this went a long way in reducing summer melt.	In previous years, we lost up to 1/3 of students who had registered in LCs during Orientation.

Opt-in and Opt-out: All students rank order 3 LCs. Some students will be prioritized as must enroll (see assumptions column) and those with 30 units already could opt-out.	GFF scholarship recipients, undeclared, pre-nursing, GPA below 3.0 would be required to be in LCs. Include HS Dual Enrollment question on EM/Interest Survey	A fully opt-in model is very time-intensive for staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRUCTURE AND RESOURCE NEEDS

Collectively, the committee asks that the following structural and resource needs be taken into consideration to support the scaling of the Learning Communities into the next academic years.

- One additional permanent Learning Communities Coordinator to address current capacity limitations for student recruitment and enrollment, supervision of EPMs, planning and implementation of co-curricular activities, etc.
- Permanent funding for co-curricular activities. The program has historically utilized Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) funding, but as we scale up, relying solely on IRA may not be feasible/sustainable.
- Learning Community Student Assistant team (aside from EPMs) to assist with co-curricular planning and administrative tasks.
- Permanent funding for EPMs which was funded by GI2025 in the Fall and IRA in the Spring. This funding model is not sustainable given the current demand for IRA versus available funds.

Call for Faculty Engagement

Ad Hoc Group on Scaling Learning Communities

In support of the ongoing work to institutionalize high impact practices at CSUCI, there is a presidential priority to place as many first time, full time first year and new transfer students as possible into a Learning Community (LC) or Living Learning Community (LLC) in the Fall 2023/24 academic year and beyond. This semester, CSUCI has 329 students enrolled in Learning Communities, nearly double the number of students in a typical fall. Enrolling additional new students in an LC/LLCs by next fall could potentially double the number of students in this program again.

At the core of this work is the affirmation and acknowledgement of the incredible work already done at CSUCI by Learning Community/Living Learning Community leaders, administrators, faculty, staff and peer educators. The work of this group will benefit greatly from many strategies and best practices already in place today at CSUCI.

In preparation for the continued scaling of LC/LLCs, HIPEE is assembling an Ad Hoc LC/LLC Committee. **Ad Hoc Group Charge:**

1. Review LC/LLC student learning, success, and retention data available at CSUCI and available literature on LC/LLC best practices.
2. Identify the top 5-10 success factors that should be considered in the scaling and implementation of LC/LLCs at an institution such as CSUCI (demographic, enrollment, funding considerations).
3. Identify the process and timeline by which LC/LLC themes/groups should be developed, proposed, evaluated, and approved.
4. Discuss the role of LC/LLCs in block scheduling and general education.
5. Submit recommendations to the Vice Provost no later than December 18, 2022.

It is our expectation that the Ad Hoc Group will consult with the Vice Provost as needed. Group Lead: Veronica Guerrero, AVP HIPEE

If you are interested in participating in this work, please email veronica.guerrero@csuci.edu by Wednesday, October 26th.

APPENDIX B – GUIDING QUESTIONS

COHORT PROPOSAL & APPROVAL PROCESS

Guiding questions to consider in discussions for scaling to 70% of FTFT students for Fall 2023 include:

1) How many different types of themes should be offered?
    a. Should we have fewer options with more cohorts per theme? Is there a maximum number of theme options that should be instated? Is there a minimum?
    b. What criteria should be met for a proposed theme to be considered? Should every theme be open to all students, or will some cohorts be limited to certain student populations? How does this impact the total number themes to be offered to meet the enrollment target?
2) What is the process by which theme proposals should be collected, evaluated and approved?
    a. Some themes may be program-specific while others may be affinity-based. How do we ensure an inclusive process that reviews all eligible submissions?
3) What should be the size of the cohorts?
    a. We are currently working within a cap of 20 students. When scaling to 70%, should other caps be considered? Should the caps be the same across all themes?
4) What block scheduling considerations should be taken when developing theme options?
    a. Without the embedded UNIV 150 courses and with the rollout of block scheduling, what is the impact of these changes on themes & cohorts that should be considered in the scaling process?
5) This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Please feel free to add additional considerations that may not have fit into the guided questions above for this sub-topic.

EPM CONSIDERATIONS

Guiding questions to consider in discussions for scaling to 70% of FTFT students for Fall 2023 include:

1) How will the removal of UNIV courses impact the role of EPMs?
   a. Does this change the workload assignments and responsibilities of EPMs in any way? Should it?
   b. How will this change the training curriculum?
2) Will the integration of block scheduling and embedded tutors into math and English courses impact the role of EPMs in any way?
   a. If yes, how might the EPM role change? How might the new programming (block scheduling, embedded tutors) support the ability for EPMs to scale with the new enrollment target? Is it possible to expand the number of students assigned to EPMs without a negative impact on the student experience? And, while keeping to the workload of 20 hours per week?
3) What processes should be considered in the recruitment and retainment of EPMs?
   a. How might recruitment practices be adjusted to attract a larger pool of applicants? What adjustments might be needed to increase the number of EPMs who stay on to lead and serve for multiple years?
   b. What is the feedback from EPMs on their role? What challenges do they face in this work? What suggestions do they offer for improvements?
4) What role might EPMs play in the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of LC/LLC students during the recruitment and admissions process?
5) This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Please feel free to add additional considerations that may not have fit into the guided questions above for this sub-topic.

EVENTS & PROGRAMMING CONSIDERATIONS

Guiding questions to consider in discussions for scaling to 70% of FTFT students for Fall 2023 include:

1) What are the marquee activities and events that are essential to the LC/LLC program?
    a. Which activities foster the greatest sense of belonging and connection to CSUCI?
    b. Which events foster the greatest development of academic self-efficacy in LC/LLC students?
    c. What programming activities provide the most support to student success (consider academic success, personal development, professional development)?
2) What programming activities might we consider suspending during the scaling of the overall program?
    a. Which activities or events produce low participation rates?
    b. Which activities require extensive work but do not seem to deliver on desired results & impact?
    c. Can these identified activities be reimagined? Or can the desired impact and results be achieved through other resources and programming on campus (via Student Affairs programming, LRC programming, Mission-Based Centers Programming, Student Research, etc)
3) What programming activities might provide the greatest impact in retaining students to Spring semester and to the following year?
    a. If the activity/programming does not exist in current programming, what suggestions/best practices do you recommend?
4) This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Please feel free to add additional considerations that may not have fit into the guided questions above for this sub-topic.

RECRUITMENT, ENROLLMENT & RETENTION

Guiding questions to consider in discussions for scaling to 70% of FTFT students for Fall 2023 include:

1) Should there be an opt out enrollment process?
    a. Will this apply to all students? Or do some student populations opt in and other populations opt out? Note: there are some groups that have already been identified as needing to participate in LC/LLC.
    b. What are the pros and cons to consider in the opt out process?
    c. What criteria should be considered for students that wish to opt-out?
2) How will students submit interest in the different communities offered?
    a. What will be the process by which their input is evaluated, and they are assigned?
    b. What are some best practices and past experiences to consider in designing, communicating, and implementing this process?
3) What processes should be implemented in retaining enrolled students in their assigned LC/LLC?
    a. There was intensive work done in Summer 22 with very positive results. How might this be scaled and bolstered to support the target enrollment? What success factors need to be considered?
4) What are other points of potential disenrollment that should be considered and addressed to decrease/eliminate melt in the first few weeks of the semester?
5) This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Please feel free to add additional considerations that may not have fit into the guided questions above for this sub-topic.

Please enter your recommendations with supporting data and/or literature references in the table below. I have provided for 4 recommendations per group, but feel free to additional points as needed. Below are some guidelines to approaching this step of the process.

1) Please create a statement that encapsulates a recommended approach for scaling the learning communities as it pertains to the sub-group topic.
2) Please identify whether the recommendation is a new action (NEW), a modification to existing approach (MOD), or preservation of an existing approach (EXT).
3) Please identify key assumptions regarding resources (financial, human capital, time) that need consideration/alignment with the recommendation.
4) Please provide data/literature reference as appropriate to support the recommendation as a best practice, performance indicator, and/or justification, as appropriate. You can also include tables and/or charts at the end of the document and cross reference in the table.

I have provided an example below to guide the recommendations.

Recommendation	NEW/ MOD/EXT	Assumptions/Considerations	Data/Literature Reference
Combine welcome events for learning community cohorts with student convocation to maximize resources and increase participation.	*MOD*	*Offering student course credit to increase participation needs faculty approval.* *Collaboration with convocation committee for a space to allow LCs to convene (pre and/or post ceremony)*	*Low student participation rate at welcome event for cost of event (exact number to be provided)*