**Starting a New Learning Community (LC)**

**PART I**

**Initial planning:**

Learning communities (LCs) combine diverse groups of professors and students in a collaborative and supportive environment centered on a common theme or research question. COCC offers two learning community models: a **coordinated study model** where instructors team-teach during a single time block or a **linked course model** where instructors share a student cohort but teach in separate classrooms at separate times.

***Collaborative Preparation***

Both coordinated study and linked LCs require a lot of diligent preparation and collaboration. As you prepare your LC, considering visiting an existing course or talking with faculty who have already participated in Learning Communities about their experiences. Once you have selected a colleague or colleagues with whom you feel you will work well, start sketching out how you will link your courses using the following checklist:

* Decide if you prefer a coordinated study community (team-taught) or a linked course community.
* Consider the viability of your offering. If possible, teach courses that are in the top 20 courses taken by first-time full-time students.
* Share syllabi. Look for course outcomes and goals that are the same or similar.
* Based on your common outcomes and goals, think about how you can combine course instruction and course assignments.
* Make a list of themes or research questions that satisfy the outcomes and goals of your shared courses.
* Discuss grading philosophies, evaluation methods, and ways to divide responsibilities (e.g. Will assignments for one course be dependent on assignments from another course? Will instructors share or have separate grading responsibilities?)

***Best Practices***

The most successful learning communities typically include existing courses that that meet common degree requirements or that support other student success and retention goals. The following best practices may also contribute to the success of your proposed learning community:

* Assign your community a creative title that will attract students and provide a term-long focus for them (e.g. a writing and a sociology community might be titled “*Lost*: The Televised Mind,” a philosophy and literature community might be titled “The American Way: How We Choose What We Want to Believe”).
* Choose a theme that promotes student-centered or problem-centered learning; center your community on a common theme that students may explore or a research question that students may answer from a variety of perspectives.
* Focus on interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g. design group projects that integrate the content of multiple courses, emphasize as instructors the connections between your fields).
* Look for experiential learning opportunities (e.g. field trips, visits to campus resource centers, guest speakers).

***Administrative Considerations***

LCs can present unique challenges pertaining to scheduling and workload. Be sure to coordinate your plans as early as possible with your Department Chair and appropriate Dean. Also, determine scheduling and classroom needs early, and discuss these issues with administrative assistant staff, who may not yet be familiar with LC scheduling needs. Finally, check for potential scheduling conflicts that would affect enrollment in your community or impact another learning community.

***Application and Further Preparation***

**Please fill out the accompanying application with the colleague(s) with whom you plan to coordinate your LC.** Once your application has been approved, besides preparing the day-to-day activities of your courses, you will immediately need to consider how you will advertise your courses to students:

* Prepare descriptive information for class schedules.
* Make publicity decisions (flyers? posters? visits to classes? )
* Check on the registration process for your Learning Community with Admissions and Records; make sure you understand how registration will work for your community's configuration.
* Meet with advising staff and others who advise students in appropriate academic areas, (e.g. Disability Services, Veterans' Office, etc.)
* Well before registration starts, begin publicizing your learning community to staff and students.