

## Questions & Some Answers

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*How do you transition students from 1 semester to the next within your learning communities? Are they considered totally separate semesters with no regard to the first semester of cohorts OR do you somehow try to have that cohesive transition into the spring semester of gen ed courses and keep the students together?*

At A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI, we have both scenarios. Some LCs are completely separate fall to spring, and students sign up for spring depending only on what courses they need to take. Often, they will seek to continue with friends made in the fall. Seminar, our discussion course that links with English composition and a core course, does have a standard sequence of themes that develop from fall to spring. In fall, they look at high school transition, significant learning, and learning goals, while in spring, students focus on career/major exploration and reflection on their first year. Our major-based LCs, such as the SLC, do assume to have the same students all year and assignments progress from August to May. Cohesion is built through reflection activities in both English and seminar.

*Then the obvious follow-on question would be related to the logistics, challenges, successes of the second semester.*

Logistics mainly fall on advising, and we have advisors visit classes to encourage students to make appointments to register appropriately for spring. Challenges include classroom dynamics that heighten disorder in spring due to increased familiarity and cynicism in the second semester. Successes include the heightened expectations for collaboration, including an optional First Year Research Conference for students to present research projects to the cohort.

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*Sharing details re: student performance among faculty teams (legality, pros/cons, privacy)*

A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI has interpreted privacy issues not to be a restriction to communication about a student so long as the faculty and/or staff involved are working to help that student learn and/or seek resources to help them learn. One obvious limitation is staff of the counseling center, which cannot share information regarding clients. The tutoring center will not divulge what is discussed or worked on in a session; however, they will share whether/not a student is attending sessions. We have two foci: academic issues and behavioral/social issues. We have forms to report issues & have developed procedures. Faculty teams identify students in trouble and report them to an intervention team (including peer mentors) as early as possible in the semester, sometimes as early as week 2.

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*The phenom of student peer-group bonding and peer accountability (I've noticed this already, and I think it's going to be good for retention, but it seems to bring with it some "young" behavior as well.)*

These are huge issues nationally, and to some extent, LC bonding does exacerbate normal FY immaturity issues because it builds bridges, makes students more familiar with each other and with faculty. Gale Stuart's (a former employee in our institutional research office) data showed that moving students into different groups on a regular basis helped them to build broader, looser networks and aided student success. Also, faculty may need help to manage classroom behavior by structuring active, collaborative, student-centered plans for small classes and opportunities for active learning in large lectures. Students and faculty can define expectations for classroom behavior, and/or faculty can include these on their syllabi.

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*What is the impact of introducing non-learning community students into a learning community course? Perhaps, there are advantages and disadvantages.*

Any learning goals or shared assignments your team has defined must either be altered or omitted for the non-LC students who are admitted. It creates more work for faculty, so our faculty have unanimously decided against allowing mixed groups. The only advantages are (1) to fill in enrollments on small classes if administrators insist on having minimum number of students, and (2) to provide a control group for measuring LC activities. It is generally regarded as not a good idea to do this.

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*To what extent is it necessary or useful for learning community faculty to be seen in courses working side-by-side in the classroom?*

We rarely have faculty teaching together, but for many LC programs that is their model and they do it all the time. As an institution, Texas Wesleyan should probably decide what it wants as its model. In our structure, teachers will combine classes for special occasions, such as student presentations. Any connection will reinforce your LC, so even a simple casual comment, "I know that in history you are studying the slave revolt at Harper's Ferry," will encourage students to see that you talk to each other and the links between the courses. Also, faculty can model respectful argument, critical inquiry, and debate for students.

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*I would like to explore the possibility of LC classes working together on a campus-wide project, such as bring a current documentary film to campus for writing across all LC and other freshman classes or organizing an exhibition of LC and other English class work (like a wall where they can post poems and memorial writings). I am still unfamiliar with what currently is happening on campus each year--that these kinds of activities may already be part of the campus scene.*

We have an-end-of-semester event that includes all students. We reserve the ballroom and have a science-fair style "First Year Celebration," a one day event that allows students to share the research they've been working on all semester in the English classes. Often, an LC theme or disciplinary focus in political science, biology, or history, will be required. We invite the campus & all FY students are required to attend and present. In spring, we host the "First Year Research Conference," for which we accept proposals, accept/reject proposals, and provide 20 minute time slots on a panel to present. An alternative format in spring is the short film, and some students have jumped at the opportunity to translate their in-class work into video.

One LC team, focused on political science, chose to conduct a campus-wide survey to collect data on students and moved through the research process in a collaborative effort. The political science/environmental science honors learning community last year resulted in the formation of a new student organization committed to ecological concerns. So there are many possibilities for publication and broader, community-based activities.

Research by Jillian Kinzie, using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, demonstrates that this type of co-curricular activity has a strong impact on student learning. We recommend pursuing this type of activity. Perhaps you can collaborate with student affairs professionals.