

**“FRIENDS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES”:
LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN
BUILDING COMMUNITY AT A LARGE URBAN UNIVERSITY**

Prepared for Temple Learning Communities by Research For Action

Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Ph.D. and Tabatha Abu El-Haj with Eva Gold, M.Ed.

August 1997

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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I. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Research for Action evaluated Temple Learning Communities during the 1996-1997 academic year. The research was qualitative, looking deeply at Learning Communities (LC) in three different schools. We chose communities that represented a range of LC models – from different schools, characterized by different kinds of courses linked in different ways, and featuring courses of different sizes. Research methods included classroom observations, interviews of students, faculty and administrators, and shadowing students. The study was informed by the following broad research questions:

- How do differently positioned people define the goals of Learning Communities?
- How do students experience Learning Communities? What makes for a strong experience for students?
- How do professors and graduate assistants experience Learning Communities?
- What kinds of connections does the Learning Community program have to the university as a whole?

II. FINDINGS

A. THE SHAPE OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

1. The context, priorities and structures of different schools shape their Learning Communities in different ways.
2. The shape and supporting structures of the Freshmen Seminar, including its connection to Learning Community classes, look different in different schools. Many administrators, especially those whose responsibilities extend beyond academics, expressed strong support for such classes. Most students name specific ways they had benefited by taking part in the Seminar. Students also voiced concerns about the Seminar, many of which may relate to an underlying sense that the course does not match their vision of what a college course should be. The structure of the SBM Freshmen Seminars allows the seminar to serve additional purposes such as building community and an on-going relationship with an advisor.

3. Interdisciplinary connections between Learning Communities are valued very differently by different program stakeholders, with most prioritizing other program features. Many faculty and administrators call the goal of making LCs interdisciplinary especially challenging and cite specific barriers to this process. Yet many faculty incorporate such connections in some, albeit often limited, way. Some faculty and students particularly value this aspect of the experience. Faculty who had attempted to craft closer interdisciplinary links in their LC often spoke about it with excitement.

B. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

1. Entry

Across the board the message about what participating in a Learning Community involves is not powerfully communicated to students. Yet once students are in learning communities, they come to value the opportunities afforded by the program.

2. Diverse Assessments of Learning Communities

The majority of participants in all three LCs we studied spoke positively of LCs. There was, however, no single kind of LC experience. Amidst the diverse range of experiences, student status as residents or commuters seemed to be salient, with commuters facing more barriers to drawing full benefit from LCs.

3. Academic Aspects of Learning Communities

Students pointed to several aspects of Learning Communities that had enhanced their engagement with academics during their first semester at Temple. They felt that LC faculty were caring, effective and engaged. They talked of how the LC can enhance group work which in turn supported their learning. They appreciated the way LC professors coordinated assignments and workload within the community.

4. Social Connections and Learning Communities

The majority of students felt that Learning Communities had helped them connect with other students. Some of these connections were primarily in-class, whereas others extended to students lives outside the classroom.

C. FACULTY

1. Learning Communities are flexible enough that individual professors and GAs can construct them to reflect their own interests and priorities.

2. All of the professors and graduate assistants we interviewed reported that teaching in a learning community had affected their pedagogy and/or their perspective on teaching and learning in some way. Professors and GAs reported some similar kinds of effects, but their differing status as teachers (e.g. relatively

experienced vs. new/apprentice) shaped their experience differently. Professors, with more teaching experience and a longer term commitment to Temple, were particularly energized by the experience; it seemed to provide an opportunity and an impetus to reinvent aspects of their teaching.

3. In discussing the goals of Learning Communities, many faculty talked of helping students successfully make the transition from high school to college. They voiced a range of expectations about what students already know and what they need to know and about their own role in supporting this transition. Some GAs seemed unsure of how to help less prepared students.

4. Across the board, faculty described Learning Community students as more connected to their peers than those in non Learning Community classes. They cited a number of outcomes of this increased connection, some of which (including speaking out more, having greater confidence to ask questions, being more receptive to group work) enhance the academic experience and some which concern them (such as uniting in resistance to academic work).

5. Most faculty found that despite the enhanced connections among students, it was difficult to schedule out of class social or academic activities. Those extra activities which were most successful had an academic component.

6. Graduate Assistants play a central role in many learning communities. Professor-GA collaboration in all three communities supported some faculty in aspects of their work and benefited their students. Because of role differences between GAs and professors and limits on GAs role and power, it can be difficult for GAs and professors to work together as equals. This affects the possibilities for what LCs can be and do. Extensive use of GAs in Learning Communities may support the growth and development of GAs as teachers; it does not further the goal of changing faculty culture.

7. Faculty and administrators identified several institutional barriers that they felt hindered faculty involvement in Learning Communities. They include the culture of commuting, requirements which work against faculty choosing to teach smaller classes, and the pull to invest time in research rather than teaching.

D. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS/STRUCTURES

1. The Learning Communities Office and staff received high marks in terms of accessibility, commitment and support offered to Learning Community faculty.

2. A strength of the LC program is that it draws broad support from different schools and programs and from people variously situated in Temple administrative roles; many people see the LC effort supporting their own work.

Some of these people have fairly minimal knowledge of what actually happens in LCs.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

A. The Shape of Learning Communities

1. More intensive focus on group work.
2. Support and encourage teachers in making interdisciplinary connections between courses.
3. Continue experimenting with the Freshmen Seminar.
4. Reflect on the shape of LCs at Temple
5. Consider experimenting on a small scale with some innovations of the LC model.

B. Enhancing Students' Experience of Learning Communities

1. Experiment with new ways to get the message about Learning Communities to students.
2. Address needs of commuters within LCs.

C. Supporting Faculty Involvement in Learning Communities

1. Articulate incentives to LC involvement and address barriers.
2. Provide on-going faculty development and support.

D. Institutional Interrelationships

1. Develop ways for faculty to network about teaching in LCs, e.g. sharing of ideas and experiences.
2. Build on breadth of support for LCs throughout administrative structures by finding ways to share more of the texture and the benefits of what happens in LCs. Find ways to increase administrators' involvement with the program.

I. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Temple University launched its Learning Communities program in Fall 1993, funded by a multi-year grant from the Pew Foundation. Learning Communities aim to improve the first semester experience and the retention of Temple freshmen by increasing students' feelings of belonging and sense of community at Temple; helping students connect with peers for academic and social purposes; deepening interaction among faculty and between students and faculty; and creating interdisciplinary links between courses that are part of LC.¹

Research for Action evaluated Temple Learning Communities during the 1996-1997 academic year; we focused on fall 1996 Learning Community classes. The research was qualitative, looking deeply at Learning Communities in three different schools. This research complements survey and other quantitative data collected separately by the Learning Communities office.

The study was informed by the following broad research questions:

- How do differently positioned people define the goals of Learning Communities?
- How do students experience Learning Communities? What makes for a strong experience for students?
- How do professors and graduate assistants experience Learning Communities?
- What kinds of connections does the Learning Community program have to the university as a whole?

Qualitative research methods provided the best fit for this research. Qualitative methods enable understanding the meaning perspectives of participants as well as exploration of educational and change processes rather than of specific quantifiable outcomes. By looking in-depth at three Learning Communities it is possible to learn a great deal about Learning Communities in general. The research developed complex understandings of these individual instantiations and how they are different and similar. This kind of research also enabled us to understand the complications and nuances of surface similarities, e.g. what do different students in different communities mean when they agree with the statement that participating in a Learning Community eased their transition to college?

Together with Learning Communities (LC) staff, we selected three LCs for in-depth study, seeking to identify examples that represented a range of LC models— from different schools, characterized by different kinds of courses linked in different ways, and featuring courses of different sizes. We, with the assistance of the LC office and participating professors, also identified five students for “shadowing;” we sought a mix of students that reflected the gender, race, and commuter/residential status in the Learning

¹ These goals are drawn from Learning Community materials and from themes which surfaced frequently in interviews.

Community.² (See Appendices A and B for further information about the Learning Communities and the students that were part of the research.)

During the fall semester, we observed extensively in all three Learning Communities. We observed the range of classes in each community, prefacing and following each observation with a brief interview with the professor or Graduate Assistant (GA) in order to understand better the context and goals of the class. During this time period we also shadowed six³ students, i.e. spent one-half day with them doing whatever they normally do at Temple, both in and out of class. We conducted in-depth interviews with these students.

During the spring semester, we did in-depth interviews with LC faculty⁴ from the Learning Community classes we had observed and with 21 administrators variously placed in Temple's administration and departments. These administrators included department heads, the provost, representatives of admissions, residential life, student advising, student affairs, and deans of various schools. We conducted three focus groups with students from the three fall Learning Communities; focus group participants also completed brief surveys.

The report which follows presents findings and then recommendations. Findings are organized into four different areas: (1) the Shape of Learning Communities; (2) Student Experience; (3) Faculty; and (4) Institutional Interrelationships. The first section describes some of the ways Learning Communities differ by school as well as some of the other factors that shape Learning Communities, e.g. the presence or absence of connected Freshmen Seminars and the degree of interdisciplinary connectedness. The second section presents profiles of two students who had positive but very different Learning Community experiences and discusses findings related to how students learn about LCs, and their experiences of both the academic and social aspects of the program. The third section focuses on faculty impact on Learning Communities and, in turn, on how teaching Learning Community classes affects both professors and GAs. It looks at issues such as how teachers see their role in helping students make the transition to college, their assessment of students' social relationships within Learning Communities, the collaborative relationships of professors and GAs and barriers to their involvement in LCs. The last section looks at some of the ways the Learning Communities program is connected to the university overall; specifically it examines participants' assessment of the LC office and how variously situated administrators see the role of LCs. Although LC faculty development was not a focus of our research, it did arise in our conversations with faculty, and this last section also touches on this topic. The recommendations and implications are organized using the same four large categories as the Findings sections.

² Commuters and Caucasian students were over-represented in the group for shadowing. We solicited the input of a more diverse group of students through focus groups.

³ One of these students was not part of a LC; she was in a Freshman Seminar.

⁴ Learning Community faculty refers to both professors and GAs. This report uses pseudonyms for LC faculty and students.

II. FINDINGS

A. THE SHAPE OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The first part of this section describes some of the differences that characterize Learning Communities in different schools. These profiles provide context for this section and the report as a whole. The section continues with three findings about factors which affect the shape of individual Learning Communities.

Learning Community Profiles

School of Business and Management

The School of Business and Management (SBM) has made a particularly strong commitment to Learning Communities. Though they still work in tandem with the LC office, they, more than other schools, have taken on administration and direction of their Learning Communities. All Business freshmen are required to participate in the three linked courses -- a large law lecture taught by Professor Lattimer, a writing course and Freshmen Seminar. In the LC we observed, the writing course was taught by Ms. Newman and the Freshmen Seminar by Ms. Thomas. The SBM is the only school to link Freshmen Seminars (FS) to the LC classes so that the same group attends three classes together. In fall 1997, the SBM will add a fourth class to their LC. An administrator said, "Our whole curriculum is being built around Freshmen Seminar. (It) is laying out options and delineating possible career paths....(The school is working to) change the culture of how they (students) view a business education," in part by stressing internships, externships and involvement in student organizations, all of which are featured in FS. Thus, the Freshmen Seminar plays a particularly central role in the SBM by socializing students to the business school and preparing them to actively shape their college career in ways that will lead to a job.

The SBM sees the LC as a whole as part of its efforts to improve retention. With the mandatory LC, the SBM can offer a "small college feel....(with the opportunity to) make friends, study with them.....(It) gets students involved earlier so they won't be lost....(Students) are socially connected (through LC) more than (through) anything else....It's an important mechanism in a school like this (to create the connections)...and friendships (which elsewhere might be formed in a residence hall)," according to an SBM administrator. The SBM does not emphasize making interdisciplinary connections between classes and leaves this up to individual teachers to negotiate (see section on interdisciplinary connections below).

A key factor in this retention effort is that students are "constantly with advisors (since they teach FS). It's a support system," according to the administrator. Students get to know their advisors and continue to have contact with them after the semester ends. In addition, the School has urged LC teachers to communicate with each other if students are having problems. Both teachers of the linked classes that we interviewed mentioned

contacting the Freshmen Seminar instructor about specific problems; often issues would be addressed with students by both the advisor and the instructor.

School of Communications and Theater

In the School of Communications and Theater (SCAT), Learning Communities are organized around courses that are fairly large for SCAT (e.g. 40-50)⁵ which are then connected with the needed number of writing course sections. In the LC we observed, Professor Rayna taught a course for majors and Mr. Marks, a GA, the two linked comp sections. As in SBM, Freshmen Seminars are required and are taught by SCAT advisors, but they are not connected to LCs. In SBM, Learning Communities are coordinated at the school level, whereas in SCAT they seem to be organized at the departmental level. Within each department, LCs function fairly autonomously, i.e. their structure is primarily defined by their faculty. Both the FS and LCs are organized by major, so there can be significant overlap between LC and FS classes.

Like SBM students, those at SCAT presumably share interests related to majors or career goals. Some faculty said that this enabled them to build on those interests in constructing a LC class. SCAT and its departments are also relatively small (at least compared with Arts and Sciences), thus the task of building community is somewhat different. One department head described his department as almost like an LC in and of itself. He said that by sophomore year, classes are fairly small, and most students are integrated into an already existing community. In his department, LCs can start the process of community-building (of connecting students to peers, faculty and their department) earlier, thus they support a process that already exists. He noted that they “certainly want to do more of them (LCs).”

College of Arts and Sciences

The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) is a large school with a diverse array of departments, majors and Learning Communities. Given the many different majors within the school and a high number of undecided students, most CAS Learning Communities cannot be organized around shared majors or even a common broad direction like business. Departments often play a coordinating role (with some more actively involved than others) with the LC office holding most of the program responsibility. Most communities focus on core or required courses such as writing, math, psychology, political science, sociology. Some of these courses are very large; sometimes professors are involved and sometimes the primary LC involvement is that of the GAs who teach the recitation sections (as in the psychology class we observed). The CAS Learning Community we studied involved GAs Sliwinski and Hutchins teaching psychology sections. Professor Koller taught the linked math course, along with several GAs including Mr. Simmons. Freshmen Seminars in this school are taught by a professor and

⁵ The size of these classes is typical for SCAT freshmen courses but large compared to the upper level courses SCAT majors take.

an undergraduate with some guest appearances by an advisor. They are not linked to specific LCs, but students interested in Freshmen Seminars are strongly encouraged to register for an LC also. A few FS have been linked to a career path, e.g. pre health professional.

The School seems to use LCs to make large core courses more user friendly and, as one Arts and Sciences administrator said, to “offer students a more comfortable entry into a huge, complicated university system.” This administrator hoped that LCs would encourage faculty to see their teaching role more broadly, i.e. that they might help students relate their academic experiences to career plans. These kinds of emphases may be present in individual courses, but unlike in SBM there is no overall strategy to encourage it. This kind of approach is more challenging in CAS because it has to be more general. As this administrator said, “In (other schools) it’s very clear what the connection (to career goals) is and what alumni to recruit to speak or for internships. In Arts and Sciences we have former history majors working in chemical companies.... It’s not as neat and tidy.”

1. The context, priorities and structures of different schools shape their Learning Communities in different ways.

As indicated in the profiles above, a number of factors shape the different look of LCs in different schools. These include:

- the kinds of courses linked;
- the extent to which students share majors/interests;
- the varying uses of the Freshmen Seminar;
- linkage to other school-wide initiatives; and
- the degree of school or department-wide coordination.

2. The shape and supporting structures of the Freshmen Seminar, including its connection to Learning Community classes, look different in different schools. Many administrators, especially those whose responsibilities extend beyond academics, expressed strong support for such classes. Most students named specific ways they had benefited by taking part in the Seminar. Students also voiced concerns about the Seminar, many of which may relate to an underlying sense that the course does not match their vision of what a college course should be. The structure of the SBM Freshmen Seminars allows the seminar to serve additional purposes such as building community and an on-going relationship with an advisor.

We did not set out to research the Freshmen Seminar (FS) component of Learning Communities as fully as the other linked courses, in part because in only one of the schools we studied are FS always a part of the LC experience. Nevertheless our observations and conversations began to raise questions about the role of the FS. This section sketches how Freshmen Seminars differ by schools and points to issues for further consideration.

As previously mentioned, the FS has been most fully embraced by the School of Business and Management, where it is part of the mandatory LC experience of all freshmen. At the SBM, a major role of the advisor-taught FS is to improve retention through coordination between professors of the others linked courses and the advisor. The FS is also tied to the school's commitment to student professional development and seeks to help students develop an understanding of business school majors. In an attempt to connect students more closely with the business school, FS classes meet in Speakman Hall, the SBM building. In the past, many SBM freshmen had little reason to enter the building.

At SBM, the FS meets twice weekly and is a two credit course. Students meet once a week with their advisor/teacher and once in a larger group of several combined sections to hear speakers such as businesspeople, alumni, and representatives of university services such as Financial Aid. They cover topics similar to those of FS in other schools -- time management, study skills -- but also focus on career development, understanding the business school, and opportunities for experiences like internships that give students an edge in finding work. At SBM (as at other schools) the FS is fairly new and is still evolving. For example, they recently received feedback that the course required too much work to be a credit/no credit class so it was changed to a graded class.

In contrast, FS classes do not involve cohorts of students from Learning Communities in either the School of Communications and Theater or in Arts and Sciences,. SCAT FS courses are taught by advisors, and they try to register students by major. In Arts and Sciences, FS is a separate companion initiative with LC. FS classes are taught by a professor and an undergraduate peer advisor; a representative of the advising department also attends several classes. Students are required to be in a LC class in order to register but sign up separately for FS.

A number of administrators expressed strong support for the need for a course like Freshmen Seminar. These administrators tended to be those with wider administrative responsibility. Administrators such as department heads often were less familiar with the program or focused more on the academic courses linked by LC and the social/academic impact they could have on students.

In our small number of interviews with people who had taught FS (two advisors and one Arts and Sciences faculty) the advisors seemed committed to the importance of such a class and felt strongly that the skills taught in FS are very valuable for students, whereas the faculty member raised more questions about the course. An advisor at Ambler noted that there is sometimes an element of resistance to participating in the FS, e.g. "students may fight why they're there." However, in her experience:

They make friends and get some things done -- e-mail accounts, library skills, time management -- that they're not going to get accomplished anywhere else....maybe it's a little early for them to appreciate it....they're not really sure what the bonus of knowing all these things are until they're at least finished the

first semester. Students who have completed the course tell me they look back on their notes and use them. I think its great that advisors are teaching them. The students really seem to respond....They seem to be able to connect with us when they come here; they really do find a sense of belonging...I think it opens up the advising doors to them.

In contrast, the professor who taught an independent Arts and Sciences FS noted that because of students' limited contact with each other (one hour/week) they did not seem to get to know each other and that because the course is only one credit one can't expect them to do too much work. A student in an Arts and Sciences seminar had an experience similar to what this professor describes; she said she didn't know the name of anyone in her class.

Student concerns about Freshmen Seminars clustered in several areas. Some complained that the course was "easy" or "common sense," i.e. implying that they didn't need to take a class to learn these things. A SCAT student said, "there's nothing you learn in FS that you couldn't have found out if you investigated." A few complained that some of the specific skills weren't useful or questioned the time spent there, e.g. wondering if they should have been taking a course for just one credit. It seems possible that some of these concerns may be connected to the fact that for some students (as for some faculty) the seminars do not fit their conception of what a college course should be or do.

Despite this sometime lack of fit between the course and expectations and the specific concerns, most students listed specific helpful aspects of the class. In a focus group discussion, several classmates responded to the student who said they could have investigated these things themselves by pointing out that they probably wouldn't have done the investigating themselves. Through FS, two SCAT students learned about mid-semester classes, which helped them get needed credits. Another SCAT student learned about requirements for SCAT and the core and said of the teacher, "He's my number one advisor now. If I have to go to somebody for a class, I just automatically go to him and I met him (in FS)." Yet another SCAT student learned about (and got) an internship because of what she had learned in the FS. In another focus group, a SCAT student named a number of ways FS helped him -- it changed (improved) his study habits, helped him with note taking and helped him with finding a summer job. Two business students appreciated the speakers in their FS; one called some "inspiring." Another appreciated the advisor who taught the class, saying she made it fun and tried to help students. Even the student who didn't know anyone in her FS said she was glad she took it. She mentioned learning about e-mail and said the "professors were the best part." She knew they were available for questions if she needed them.

The SBM model for the Freshmen Seminar seems to offer some additional benefits that are largely absent in the other schools. Since it is taught by an advisor and consists of a group already together in the other linked courses, it has the potential to make an important contribution to building community among LC students and to

strengthening students' relationship to a specific advisor.

3. Interdisciplinary connections between Learning Communities are valued very differently by different program stakeholders, with most prioritizing other program features. Many faculty and administrators call the goal of making LCs interdisciplinary especially challenging and cite specific barriers to this process. Yet many faculty incorporate such connections in some, albeit often limited, way. Some faculty and students particularly value this aspect of the experience. Faculty who had attempted to craft closer interdisciplinary links in their LC often spoke about it with excitement.

When Learning Community classes are connected in interdisciplinary ways, faculty collaborate to link courses through shared themes, materials and assignments and/or use work in one course to raise questions about ideas in another discipline. The first part of this finding describes the interdisciplinary connections we saw in the three LCs as well as those in two highly linked LCs other interviewees described to us. It then turns to faculty and administrators' perceptions, student perceptions and, finally, to barriers to making LCs more interdisciplinary.

Kinds of Connections

According to an SBM dean, the school is not "choosing to push (academic connections) right now....Everybody shares their syllabus. If they can match them up then it's just as good for (students)....it helps(them)." She noted that business students are often "too narrowly focused" and so they do not want comp instructors to organize their courses around business topics. The school has tried to have all three classes deal with ethics at some point. They have coordinated with the English department to do this. "In Freshmen Seminar they do ethics in business and plagiarism. In law class they touch on ethics and in Comp they may do a specific reading and an essay related to ethics." In the SBM Community we observed, the professor of the large lecture shared his syllabus with faculty of linked courses. Newman, the ELECT teacher, used this law and society emphasis as her theme and sometimes asked students about their work in the large class. The final assignment in her class involved proposing a law students thought society needed.

In the School of Arts and Sciences, the limits on GA initiative and the lack of involvement of professors in the psychology lecture discussed below were barriers to interdisciplinary connections. Despite this, the Math-Psychology LC had a significant amount of interdisciplinary activity, in part because of the math professor's interest. Much of it took place among the faculty but there was also an assignment that sought to relate math and psychology. Math and psychology GAs met weekly with Koller, the math professor, at a coffee hour and often discussed teaching, students and their disciplines. The following excerpt from fieldnotes captures one exchange about teaching that occurred at the coffee hour:

Professor Koller noted that he had found an article as an example of the research

project he'd been announcing. It had difficult psychology and hard math but was based in common sense. Hutchins, a psychology GA, noted that the next topic in the psychology class is social psychology and that she would begin her work on it with "common sense" sayings. She planned to juxtapose contradictory ones such as "out of sight, out of mind" and "absence makes the heart grow fonder" and then talk with them about which was true, how we can have opposite sayings. Koller grew even more animated and said, "This is what we've been trying for all year. Working on the same theme!"

Hutchins explained more about how she would use the common sense sayings, e.g. get students to think about where common sense comes from. Koller started talking about probabilities and their relationship to common sense. On the board, he did a probability chart for which restaurant his wife might pick to eat in. Hutchins noted that one can create probabilities (related to psychological concepts). Koller enthusiastically said that he now sees a much richer connection between the two courses than he's imagined.

During this discussion there was a high level of engagement and energy from both GAs and professor as they explored connections between their subjects.

Faculty in this LC indicated that students were benefiting from the academic links between the courses. Koller initiated an interdisciplinary assignment (the research project above) which was graded by both himself and psychology GAs. The assignment involved reading an article which combined psychology and math (e.g. an article from a psychology journal that uses mathematics) and writing about the two. He described the response to this assignment as "unbelievable....The papers were 100% better than others" (he has had other times with this assignment). He felt it had been "so much fun" to read them. The math GAs seemed to have relatively little role in the project. A psychology GA said, "It worked out pretty well. It gave students a taste of the ways math is used and joined the classes together, which was supposed to be the point of Learning Communities. I wish we could have done more." Hutchins said at the coffee hour that though she's been disappointed in student disinterest in out of class social activities, she feels Learning Communities are "worth it for the academic interaction" and that students are getting a lot from the fact that the classes are associated. She said that in her section she referred to what was happening in the math class.

In the SCAT learning community, GA Marks and Professor Rayna shared materials and communicated by e-mail. Each tried to build some links to the other's theme or content into his course. They discussed but did not implement a joint assignment at the end of the course. Rayna indicated that though he did try to make some links between course material, he did not like explicitly referring to the other class. "What I find is if you bring up the other class, students begin to backbite or have things to say that are not always positive (about it or the teacher). I don't want to hear it."

Two administrators we talked with had taught LC courses with high degrees of

interdisciplinary collaboration. We sketch them here to indicate some other models of this kind of work. One administrator taught a core course from his own discipline; the two linked comp sections were taught by GAs from his department. It felt like “the three of us were teaching both courses (and)...(it) worked extremely well.” Almost every paper students did in comp was for his class. Comp instructors used the papers to work on outlining, notetaking, drafting and revising and graded on process. He got the final paper and graded on product. Many students said this was a positive experience. A department head taught an Intellectual History (IH) course linked to a somewhat technical course in his SCAT department.. He could customize IH to his own and students’ interests and worked to help students see connections and to make them themselves, encouraging the students to relate material back and forth. He felt the course was very successful, “especially when students made jumps back and forth themselves.”

Perceptions of Faculty and Administrators

Though a small group of faculty and administrators emphasized the exciting potential of interdisciplinary connections between LC classes, most of those we observed did not prioritize this aspect of Learning Communities. Congruent with our observations, when we solicited views on the goals of LCs, seven out of the nine LC faculty we interviewed did not mention interdisciplinary collaboration. They were certainly aware of this goal and many had even incorporated it into their classes, although usually in a fairly minimal way. They tended to focus more on other goals, such as retention, helping students with the transition to college and increasing their feelings of belonging at Temple.

Administrators’ responses were similar. A dean noted that she didn’t see interdisciplinary connections between courses as a primary goal, but that “to the extent students get better served because instructors talk to each other, it’s very beneficial.” The provost noted that he likes the concept of linking courses but doesn’t want to mandate it. He hopes that as LC faculty talk about their students together, they will see some ways to link their courses.

Some faculty and administrators explained how particular schools and the Learning Community office itself over time have structured the program to give primary emphasis to other goals, in part because of some of the lessons learned in the early years of implementing Learning Communities. For example, a dean at the Business school said they had tried running LCs where two classes shared course content in the first year and felt it did not work that well. Dan Tompkins of the LC office explained that the very specialized courses which faculty initially wanted to teach as LC courses were not popular with students and this led to more of a focus on core courses that students need to and want to take. Other administrators familiar with the history of LCs echoed this explanation. The LC office, however, is still committed to helping faculty work towards this goal.

Student Perspectives

Similar to faculty and administrators, students referred less to this aspect of Learning Communities. Some talked about the absence of such connections in their LC or seemed somewhat confused about the connections that faculty had described to us. For example, Carol, the student we shadowed from the SBM class, did not seem to perceive the thematic link between her ELECT and law classes. She told a researcher that the two were unrelated and very different. Specifically, she talked about how the purpose and nature of writing assignments differed. In general, the nature of the LC was somewhat unclear to Carol; she talked about the FS as her LC. Several students from the CAS LC talked of struggling with the interdisciplinary project, e.g. they found the journal articles they read integrating psychology and math difficult to understand. One student was disappointed in the lack of discussion about the assignment: "They didn't explain anything. There was absolutely no discussion. They just handed out the paper." Another student was surprised she had done well on the paper because "I really didn't know what I was writing. It was kind of hard." It's possible that the interdisciplinary connections between the psychology and math classes were more evident and more energizing for the faculty than the students, in part because it was the faculty who were engaged in exploring them. Were Koller and these GAs to be paired to teach in this LC again, they might be able to build on this work to make the connections more real for students.

Two themes stood out when students talked about the positive presence of interdisciplinary connections in their LC: (1) interdisciplinary integration can facilitate learning and understanding subject matter and (2) when faculty are coordinating with each other they make efforts to adjust assignments so that everything is not due at the same time. Jay from the SCAT LC said, "It makes classes easier to understand. They worked hand in hand sometimes." Students from both the Arts and Sciences and SCAT LC appreciated the fact that in LC classes, teachers "coordinated so that they know if the other is giving a hard assignment." Some students felt this interdisciplinary aspect of LCs should be more prominent.

Barriers

Administrators, faculty and sometimes students were very articulate about the barriers they saw to creating close interdisciplinary links between LC courses. These barriers were the difficulty of connecting some disciplines; the limiting structure of some courses; scheduling; and time.

Some LC stakeholders felt that some subjects are very difficult to connect and thus don't work well as paired LC courses. Much of this concern seemed to focus on math. A psychology GA in the Arts and Sciences community said that the material he "had to cover didn't lead itself to math." He suggested using a psychology class with more scientific and math content. In a focus group, one student said, "I don't see any correlation between the two (psychology and math)....I don't think that math has any business being part of a LC because there's no discussion there. You can't discuss it and

you don't get to know people personally." Math GA Simmons was to have been in an LC which paired math and Intellectual Heritage but this didn't happen. He thought "it would have been impossible to create links." Ironically, though those cited above talked about the lack of correlation between psychology and math, this was the one class that actually had a joint assignment.

A second factor that makes interdisciplinary cooperation difficult, according to some of the faculty involved, is the limiting structures of some courses. Some faculty said that the structure of English comp (especially the need to prepare for an end-of-semester exam) restricted teachers' ability to create linkages. Classes where one of the linked classes is a GA-led recitation session that only meets weekly and has a fairly inflexible structure mean there are few opportunities to go beyond already existing course requirements.

The complications of scheduling linked classes were mentioned by the administrators involved in this task. "We need to be able to maintain flexibility," said a CAS administrator.... The more interdependencies (i.e. permanently linked courses) you build into the system the more of a logistical nightmare it becomes." An administrator involved with writing programs said:

The home department generally doesn't consult with anyone before they schedule. They just decide we're offering Engineering I at this time and tell Jodi. Jodi then says I have this course at this time, back to back usually works. Then it would be up to me to go to English to find an instructor with no conflict and the English department has already established its schedule. Jodi may or may not be wanting to schedule it at that time.

He suggested that earlier coordination of LC classes might address this somewhat.

The time needed to collaborate with other professors was mentioned by a number of LC faculty.

Time's a huge factor. To communicate with somebody (teaching a linked class) at that level, when you're dealing with the intricacies of structuring a class, what are you looking at? Two or three hours a week? Who has two or three hours a week? (He elaborates on other ways LCs already demand more time, e.g. if you relate to students differently) At what point do you have to cut off the time you devote to this particular kind of venture? (Prof. Rayna)

It's easy to connect the two (courses in his LC) but real interdisciplinary teaching would be incredibly difficult....It involves how to think about things, teaching styles, how to assess people....(For GAs) teaching is very much part time and it's a loser's game to let it take up more time. (Sometimes he has met with GAs and professors from linked courses during the semester). Interactions with professors are good and help you think about what students are learning in different ways,

but they can be demanding and take up lots of time. (Marks)

Marks and Rayna both underline the time demands of teaching LC classes and the extra coordination and involvement needed for interdisciplinary teaching. Professors also need to devote themselves to research and sometimes administrative work and Marks alludes to the non-teaching aspects of his role as a graduate student. He was completing his dissertation and looking for a job when he was teaching the LC we studied. Yet both also acknowledge the positive benefits of such linkage when it is possible. Marks refers to liking the more extensive interaction with professors and says they helped him think about students. Rayna too recognized the appeal of such an approach. "Of course it would be good. It's a repetition of messages, cross-pollination. Those are good ways of learning."

Despite these many concerns, participants who had taught in LCs with close interdisciplinary connections frequently talked about how exciting the course was for them and their students. An administrator/professor said, "Every faculty member I know is craving for intellectual discussions (like those that could occur as faculty work together to teach in an interdisciplinary way). The will is there, but there are so many distractions just keeping the place going....In the long term it relates to teaching and tenure. You have to see teaching as exhilarating to invest in it; you do it whether it counts or not." Another administrator/professor talked about the intellectual excitement he thought came from connecting course content. He saw this excitement as a way to motivate faculty participation in Learning Communities.

B. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

One thrust of Learning Communities is as a transition strategy to ease the entry of freshmen into a large urban university. It is important, therefore, to examine student experience closely. This section begins with profiles describing two students -- one residential, one commuter -- from two Learning Communities. Their stories illustrate the variety of needs students enter Learning Communities with and the different experiences with which they leave. The section continues by examining findings related to four themes: (1) How students become involved with Learning Communities; (2) Students' diverse assessments of the LC experience; (3) Academic aspects of LCs; and (4) Social connections and LCs. Each of these themes is evident in the profiles. The findings section looks at them in the context of broader student experience.

Student Profiles

Iris

Iris is an African-American student from the South. Like many of the residential students we spoke to, she chose Temple for its strengths, in particular her program at the School of Communications and Theater and the diversity of Temple's student population. When Iris first heard about Learning Communities, she felt "it had a negative stigma to it because of my high school experience....(where there were teams) for kids who needed

extra help.” She thought it might be a remedial program which would “separate kids from other kids.” She signed up for the LC because it fit in her schedule. She was relieved to discover “it totally wasn’t like that (remedial).”

By December, Iris was describing a very positive Learning Community experience. Her connection to one of the professors in the LC seemed to be key to her positive experience.

Dr. Rayna, he’s an excellent teacher. He’s like a father figure to all of us. I never met a teacher who has cared about the students so much. Like he has people come in and talk about financial aid and things like that.

Dr. Rayna’s class involved a group project which extended outside of class and which required students to be part of a study group. Iris found that her study group members were the main people she’d made connections with in her Learning Community. On the day she was shadowed, Iris and her study group members were presenting their project. The following extended excerpt from a researcher’s fieldnotes describes some of the difficulties of group work as well as the social connections which students make as a result of an extended project like theirs.

Iris isn’t there yet when I [the researcher] enter. I choose a seat in the area where I saw her sit when I observed before, close to other members of her study group. There’s a lot of talking; the two women behind me are comparing notes on the Thanksgiving vacation. Iris, a thin African-American woman, arrives, and I learn that her group is doing the first presentation. Iris joins Ginette, who describes herself to me later as Portuguese and Hispanic, and two other women at a desk at the front where they are talking and getting materials ready. ... It turns out Karen, the group’s sixth member, isn’t there. ... The group is very angry that Karen isn’t there. They exchange a few comments among themselves as they sit down. Iris says, “I’m very upset.” Katie, a white woman, says, “I’m mad. I spent 10 hours typing that paper.” (The group scheduled second goes first and Katie leaves to call Karen.)

... At 11:58, an African-American woman enters carrying posters. She looks hassled. It’s Karen. I see no eye contact between her and the rest of the other group members as she enters and finds a seat. ... While Professor Rayna gives out peer evaluations to the group which has just finished, Iris’s group goes up front. ... (The six group members take turns presenting different aspects of the media innovation they have developed.) Iris often seems to take the initiative within the group to hold something up, get something, explain something....(When she speaks) she is very articulate. She speaks energetically, often motioning with her hands....Iris’s group seems better prepared and better organized than the first one. Their ideas are developed to a greater level of complexity. They have posters, a survey and a map to support it and everyone’s speaking part adds some new information.

... After class, I ask Ginette and Iris how they think it went. They say pretty well...I

say I thought it had gone well and that it was clear they had worked hard. They respond, “We did!” and explain that the group had met every Tuesday and Thursday. Daria is frustrated they couldn’t show their video. She explains they’d gone to the Gallery (and made a video) interviewing people about their reactions to their project idea even though “none of us wanted to go” on a Sunday, but we did.

Although the politics and logistics of group work can be complicated, as seen above, it is evident that Iris has formed a tight connection with the members of her study group. The group had expended a great deal of effort on their project. They met frequently and developed their idea extensively, along with a number of “extras” (survey, video, 3-D map) to support it. We observed how their connections carried over into their second class. Members of the study group walked over together and sat near one another. In two different interviews, members of the group spoke of “backing each other up” in discussions with the comp instructor. This all female group differed in several ways from some of the other self-selected study groups in Rayna’s class. All its members lived on-campus, with five of the six in the same dorm. Iris thinks the latter helped them by enabling frequent meetings; they took turns meeting in each other’s rooms.

This group was also racially diverse (three African-Americans, two Caucasians and one Hispanic). What encouraged this group to form across racial lines? In an interview, both Iris and Ginette talked of valuing Temple’s racial diversity. It’s also possible that these women shared some less visible similarities related to social class and educational preparedness. Marks talked of sociological differences characterizing students who live in dorms. “It’s all about class. (Students) need money (to afford residence halls) and a background where its ok to leave the family (e.g. to go away to school).” In the case of Iris, whom we interviewed in depth, we discovered that most of her family members had attended college. Unlike many Temple students, she was not a first generation college student. Three factors may have contributed to this group’s success. First, they all lived in residence halls. Secondly, the group’s composition met an expectation (of at least some of the members) related to Temple student diversity. Finally, the apparent class background of the students may indicate that others besides Iris came from families with experience with college education.

The connections forged by this study group in class spilled over into other aspects of their lives at Temple; members of Iris’s study group were integral to her college social life. Ginette, who participated in an interview with Iris, described how their academic connections began to expand:

The first night we had study group, all six of us, we went to Marie’s room. And we sat there and we talked a little bit about it. And then by the end of the thing, me and her (Iris), Daria, and Marie were all going to a frat party that night, together. That one night, yeah. We didn’t even know each other that well either.

Iris spent a lot of time with Ginette, often eating meals with her and two others from their floor. Iris and Ginette often went to parties with Katie and Marie, who had met

many people through athletics.. All of the study group members planned to support Daria by attending a play she was acting in toward the end of the semester. Iris described the important role the study group played for her:

I think what really made the difference when we were meeting people is the study group, definitely the study group, because I have to work with these people, and almost live with these people. Other people in the class, I mean, I see them, 'Hey, what's up?' But I know them as (only) well as I do anybody in another class.

The group met mainly to complete group tasks Dr. Rayna assigned. Though Iris had studied with other study group members a few times (e.g. to prepare for tests by asking each other questions), she felt she did better studying alone.

Interdisciplinary connections were not integral to Iris's Learning Community experience. When asked if there were connections between her classes, she replied:

I know there's supposed to be a connection. Um, sometimes, I would notice in class, like at the beginning of [Jon Marks'] class, I started noticing things that we were learning in [Dr. Rayna's class] would apply. ... And Mr. Rayna's class, they would apply to [Marks's] class. I don't know if they were supposed to apply, but I, myself, noticed. I said, 'Okay, yeah, that kind of belongs to it.' But the teacher didn't explicitly say, 'This is supposed to overflow from--'

Thus Iris did do some thinking and drawing connections herself. She seemed to be wondering what the professor had intended, i.e. were the concepts "supposed to apply." In actuality, as mentioned above, both teachers did seek to occasionally refer to concepts or topics from the other class. Dr. Rayna had made a conscious choice not to refer explicitly to Marks's class, since he felt doing so sometimes encouraged students to play faculty off against each other.

In many ways, Iris's experience reflects many of the goals the Learning Communities program has for its participants. She has made social and academic connections to peers as well as connections to faculty. She has drawn some connections for herself between the linked classes. Her connections to peers, and some of the resulting academic engagement and work, seem to have been facilitated by her status as a residential student.

Michelle

Michelle is a white commuter who lives at home with her parents. She came to Temple for mixed reasons as seen in the following excerpt from a researcher's fieldnotes.

Temple wasn't her first choice. She had applied to Hahneman's nursing school but didn't get in. A lot of her friends are at Hahneman. I think she wishes that she was in school with them. She ended up at Temple because her friend, Laura, who is at

Temple's nursing school suggested she come to Temple. The key issue in Temple's favor was that it is a University. She applied too late to get into the nursing school. She now is thinking she might want to get into early childhood education; a Temple junior she knows from her neighborhood suggested this. While we were waiting for the next class, she told me that she wants to become a teacher.

Michelle is very positive about her Learning Community when she is interviewed in December.

I think that you learn more, cause I know my math teacher's very much involved in Learning Community. I think that's why he's a better teacher. I feel like you learn more in a Learning Community. He's involved. I mean, he tries so hard to get us all involved in doing group outings cause he wants to get us involved with each other. He doesn't just want it to be a class where you come in and learn math. He wants us to be friends outside of the classroom, in the psychology class. I think that's probably why, to learn from each other.

For Michelle, Koller's efforts seem to convey a strong sense of caring at this large university to which she has as yet tenuous connections. She talks positively about the group outings, even though in fact none of the activities discussed occurred. Her own (and other students') participation in the coffee hour was fairly minimal. Michelle went once for tutoring about a "big problem" she had with the math. Nevertheless, she has a strong sense that participation in the LC has supported her learning.

In the following excerpt from an interview, Michelle talks about her social connections at Temple:

Michelle: I go to school with her [Laura from nursing school] in the morning, every morning. I see her sometimes. She's kind of hard to find too.

Interviewer: It sounds like once you're here it's sort of hard to catch up with people.

Michelle: "Sometimes. If you find them, you find them. If you don't, then you don't. I mean you might see them. It depends. Like certain people are around. Certain people aren't.

Interviewer: And so does that make it easier with your Learning Community peers?....

Michelle: I basically see them in class or recitation. I communicate more with them in recitation than I do in class because our classes are lectures. In recitation, I tend to talk to them more. When I see them, I talk to them. But I don't really see them that much.

...

Interviewer: Has your Learning Community class become part of the group you hang out with?

Michelle: Well, I socialize with them, but I don't really ... like eat lunch with them or anything. I don't do that. I don't really call them or anything like that. It's just basically that I socialize with them in class. Or I'll say hi to them or maybe talk to them for a little bit. But I don't go to computers with them or anything like that with my other friends. I don't do that.

Like many commuters, Michelle has a network of friends from high school to socialize with at home on the weekends. She commutes to Temple with her high school friend Laura, the nursing student. She is friendly with LC classmates in class, but outside of class she socializes mainly with friends from high school or with Molly, an SBM freshman and her circle of friends. Molly met many students through participating in a Conwell Center summer program.

While lack of Learning Community friends may not be cause for concern, Michelle's lack of connection to the institution seems problematic. She commented in an interview, when asked if she'd considered dropping out, that while she hasn't thought of dropping out, she might transfer if all her friends did as she sees herself as "a follower." She has not joined any student organizations and was not particularly motivated to join any even after a Freshman Seminar research project and student presentations devoted to learning about student organizations. Furthermore, like many commuters, Michelle had difficulty locating a place to spend free time.

After class, Michelle and I walked out. Michelle wanted to know what I wanted to do. I explained that we should do whatever she might normally do. She said that sometimes she tries to find some of her friends, but one of them, Molly, in particular is so social it is hard to find her. In general, unless you happen to run into people you can't find them outside of class. Today, she wasn't even going to try to find Molly. She said the other thing she normally does is check her e-mail, so that is what we went to do. Michelle told me that she really likes her small Learning Community. She loves Professor Koller. He is the best math teacher she has ever had. She apparently had a bad experience with math in high school.

...

After she had logged off, we sat in the computer room for a few minutes as Michelle wasn't sure what we should do. She doesn't normally have such a long break.

...

After we finished our interview, we made our way down to the ground floor of Anderson. Michelle wasn't sure what we should do. There was about 40 minutes before her next class, Freshman Seminar. She doesn't usually have this much time between classes as she would usually be in a psychology lecture now. I asked her what she might normally do. She said she would sit on the chairs in Anderson and watch people do this and that. She can't actually study in these couches; she finds it too distracting. As we were having this conversation, Carl from Spanish walked by and said hi to Michelle. In the end, after looking around for awhile we discovered that there were no seats to be found --a lot of students were inside because of the weather; some of them were chatting, others were reading or doing work, and several were sleeping. We decided to go over to Gladfelter Hall which Michelle said is usually empty. Gladfelter Hall was also fairly full. We eventually found two seats next to a woman on a three seater couch.

Michelle's LC experience did work to strengthen her institutional connections in one way; she credited the Learning Community with connecting her to an advisor she

would be willing to go to and to professors she felt wanted her to do well. She believed that the LC faculty were concerned about students and invested in teaching. Of Koller she said, “the way he teaches it, I understand it so much better....He wants to get us involved with each other.” Of her math recitation leader: “She’s really good too. She helps you understand if you don’t....I like her class.....She helps us get involved with each other with trying to study.” She had a similarly positive assessment of her psychology recitation leader: “She’s really good.....I had a conference with her and she went over stuff with me if I didn’t understand it. She helped me.” She was not as enthusiastic about the professors in the lecture who did not participate in the LC. She felt some of the faculty “just told you and you had to write it down. They didn’t make anything interesting.” When she assessed LCs overall, she highlighted the role of faculty: “I think definitely the first thing (about LCs) is the teachers are more involved with students....They help you more.”

Michelle noted that other people in her LC had formed study groups. Similar to Iris, she felt she needed to study alone.

She doesn’t study with anyone from her Learning Community because “I have to study by myself.” She chose to be in a Learning Community because she knew she would meet a lot of people. She thought it would be easier to move from class to class with the same people. She likes it; she has made a lot of friends. Other students have created study groups, but she needs to study alone.

Michelle’s Learning Community was the one we studied which had an interdisciplinary assignment and faculty were excited about some of the interdisciplinary connections they were making. Like other students we spoke to, however, Michelle was somewhat confused about the assignment.

Yeah, we had to go to the *Journal of Mathematics*. It was kind of hard. I didn’t understand anything. I read through a lot, and I didn’t really understand what they were saying. I picked out a computer one. How a computer is to a brain, how they’re kind of different. I picked out that. Um, I really didn’t know what I was writing. I just kind of wrote. It kind of surprised me that he called out some names that he thought the papers were actually beyond, like, an A, like, and my name was called out. And I was kind of surprised because I didn’t actually know what I was writing. I mean, I was using these big terms. I didn’t really know what they meant. I was kind of surprised he liked it. It was kind of hard.

Overall, Michelle was positive about her Learning Community experience. Her one complaint was that at orientation the program was not explained in enough detail and she didn’t understand its full benefits. She felt she shared some of the responsibility for this since she also didn’t ask more about it, though, as she said, “it was a long day.” She said she would recommend the program to an incoming freshman and tell her/him that LCs were good because you get to know more people. Classes are more interactive, and “the teachers are obviously great in the Learning Communities” and more involved and

help you more. She was especially enthusiastic about LC faculty. The Learning Community made her feel supported academically and that she could go to faculty for help. Michelle made social connections within classes though she didn't take these connections outside of class for either academic or social purposes.

1. Entry

Across the board the message about what participating in a Learning Community involves is not powerfully communicated to students. Yet once students are in Learning Communities, they come to value the opportunities afforded by the program.

The Learning Communities program aims to aid Freshmen's transition to Temple, thus the question of how students enter LCs and what they know about them when they sign up seems crucial. Some students felt satisfied with the initial information they received about Learning Communities and chose to be in them because the program seemed to address their own concerns about making the transition to college. These concerns primarily relate to worries about making social connections in a large university. The following excerpts from focus group interviews illustrate this perspective. Students were responding to a question about how they first heard of Learning Communities.

At Orientation. An advisor recommended it as good. He said that in Learning Communities you were supposed to get to know more people. That was what appealed to me. (Cora, African-American female SCAT student)

I came to Temple thinking that it just was so big, like it was going to be so big, so I wouldn't, you know, see the same people everyday. So when they said that you'd be in class with the same people two times, I just thought it's a good idea. (Maya, Asian female SCAT student)

Yeah, they said the classes were just smaller and you'd get to know more people. And I thought that would be a lot more like high school. I could associate with that easier than like a big university and being in these huge classes. (Daria, African-American female SCAT student)

Many students, however, including Michelle and Iris, cited initial misperceptions or even minimal awareness of Learning Communities. Most students first heard about Learning Communities during registration; some even seemed to have registered for a LC almost by accident or because of a chance remark someone made. One student from the Business School didn't know she was in a Learning Community. She "figured it out after the first week." This was not unlike the experience of Carol, the student from the Business School whom we shadowed in the Fall. She seemed unclear about the structure of her learning community even in December; she mainly associated her LC with the Freshmen Seminar. While it is possible that this is because in the Business School Learning Communities are required and as such students are less aware of what they are and what their purpose is, students in other schools had similar experiences of leaving

orientation confused about the nature of Learning Communities. For instance, Iris thought it was some sort of remedial program, and Michelle complained she hadn't been given enough information.

Similar to Iris, some students initially had negative reactions to the concept of a Learning Communities program, as the following excerpt from a focus group with commuters illustrates.

I didn't really know what Learning Community meant. I walked in the first time and realized it was people who had the same classes together. I thought it would be kind of corny, seeing the same people everyday.... That's not what I came to college for really. I came to meet more people. But it ended up being a way to meet more people. (Jay, African-American male SCAT student)

When I first started last semester, I didn't like the idea of being around the same people all the time, but when I did come to the Learning Community, we were friends for school purposes. (Sarika, Asian female SBM student)

Both of these students ultimately had positive Learning Community experiences which they felt helped them in their transition to the university. As a business student Sarika was required to be in a LC and Jay signed up without knowing what was involved. When they did learn more, both initially felt that being with the same students in two or three classes might limit their ability to meet people. They had come to college with the goal of meeting lots of people. Once they had had some experience with the program though, they found that it actually enabled them to make the social contacts that were their goal. When asked what the program might do to address such misperceptions, Jay suggested that the program should "explain it more .. (it's) not just two classes. It's a way to meet more people, new people. It's a lot easier on your workload as a freshman." In particular, he thought it important to stress the way in which Learning Communities ease the first semester freshman workload.

It's also clear that the past experiences and the interpretive frameworks students bring influence how they understand the messages they receive about Learning Communities. Iris, Ginette, Cora, Daria and Jay were from the same department in SCAT and heard the same presentation, yet they came away with very different impressions. All ultimately affirmed Learning Communities; Jay and Iris felt that if they had received a message about the "real" Learning Community experience, they would have been enthusiastic from the beginning. Their experiences underline the importance of the initial introduction to Learning Communities.

2. Diverse Assessments of Learning Communities

The majority of participants in all three LCs we studied spoke positively of LCs. There was, however, no single kind of LC experience. Amidst the diverse range of experiences, student status as residents or commuters seemed to be salient, with commuters facing more barriers to drawing full benefit from LCs.

Most students, like Iris and Michelle, described their LC experience in positive terms and said that it had helped them in their transition to college. Others felt that there were gaps in some areas between the goals of LCs as they understood them and their experience. This range of experience existed even within a single Learning Community. This section begins by taking a close look at two students from the CAS who felt their LC was not particularly successful. It then tries to unpack why students in this and other LCs sometimes reported very different kinds of experiences. Finally, the section looks at some of the ways that being a commuter shaped students' experiences.

At a focus group of residential students, two students described their experience of the Arts and Sciences Learning Community in very different terms from Michelle. Tranice, an African-American woman, and Elizabeth, a Caucasian woman, were both in the psychology/math Learning Community. They didn't recognize each other, and they weren't sure if they had been in the same Math class or in the same recitation section. In talking to each other and the other students in the room who'd been in a different Learning Community, the two women agreed that their Learning Community did not work for them in a number of ways. They were unaware of what the Learning Community was and who was in it; they felt faculty was not really involved in the Learning Community; and they had not made connections to other students.

For Tranice, the Learning Community experience "was almost non-existent." Tranice's roommate, Daria, was in the SCAT LC and Tranice seemed to be using Daria's experience as a point of comparison. She remembered someone in her class asking what the LC was in November. "It was not like we knew, 'Okay, this person was in Learning Community.' Cause the teachers didn't even really know, and they didn't stress it. And nobody tried to really figure out who was in it."

Elizabeth and Tranice had different experiences with the faculty of their LC. Tranice's were more positive; she attributed this to her own efforts. Elizabeth describes her relationships as one in which she

never said a word with either of my teachers in the two Learning Communities. I never had any words with them. They didn't even know who I was. I wasn't really comfortable approaching them because it's not like they knew me in class. It's not like they'd heard my opinions in class because it was just too big.

Tranice, on the other hand, believed that the faculty "weren't standoff-ish at all. They wanted to help you. If you wanted help, they were available, ... but it wouldn't be a case where you know we get to know them personally." She got to know her professors personally "just because I was purposely all in their face, all the time." She explained that her approach to getting to know faculty was based on her experience at a large high school where "if you wanted to be known that was basically your responsibility so I came here with that attitude." Despite their differing experiences of faculty, both women agreed that a key factor in the failure of the Learning Community was that faculty weren't

interested in promoting the Learning Community. Elizabeth comments, “You know it’s not like they tried to, um, encourage people working together. It wasn’t like that. I feel that if anything it’s ironic but [of] my classes they [Learning Community classes] were the least personal.” Elizabeth’s other classes were smaller than the big lecture portions of her LC classes.

Both women also said that they had not made social connections in their Learning Community class. The classes were big, and the recitations were primarily a place where “if you had any questions about the test that was coming up, you’d ask.” There was group work on occasion, but the content of group work was primarily exercises which didn’t encourage “conversation or anything outside of what we were doing.” These two students did not seem to find the recitations particularly helpful. Michelle, on the other hand, praised the recitation leaders for helping her understand the material. Other students we spoke with also found them helpful. Tranice and Elizabeth seem to be speaking to some of the concerns shared by the recitation leaders themselves, e.g. they were limited in what they could do in the sections, both because of meeting only weekly and because their sessions were primarily focused on exam preparation and giving exams. Neither Elizabeth nor Tranice knew the names of the students in their classes. Elizabeth did have a friend in the class, but had met her in another context.

Despite these disappointments about Learning Communities, both women seemed to like the idea of the LC program. Tranice had seen her roommate’s positive experience and thought that LCs “can be extremely helpful academically and socially depending on your particular Learning Community. However, the experience can also be almost non-existent because of the people within the Learning Community. In my particular Learning Community, the people were not interested and communicative.” Elizabeth told us she is planning to take another Learning Community in the Fall of her sophomore year, one which has to do with her major. When asked why, she replied:

I figured maybe you know it’s more specific, and everyone is there because [they have the same major] I’ll have people that I can discuss outside problems as far as like you know getting through the requirements for my major, but otherwise I wouldn’t try it again because that class was just too big. I’m surprised to hear that they (others in the focus group from the SCAT LC) had such a good experience. I didn’t know. I really didn’t. I just did it for the convenience.

Although these women left their Learning Communities with some positive views on the program as a whole, both expressed concern that the disappointment of not getting the experience one expected -- in particular social connections in a large institution -- might be doubly discouraging to in-coming freshman.

When asked what recommendations they had for improving Learning Communities, they suggested encouraging projects which would make students have to meet after class and thus help them make more social connections. They also suggested working on the content correlation between the classes.

Comparing these descriptions of the Learning Community to Michelle's story illustrates how student experience varies even within a community. Furthermore, we know that the faculty in this LC were, in fact, very interested in the program and did try to foster social connections. The contradictions and differences of experience across students in the same community were most explicit in the psychology/math LC but were also evident in other Learning Communities. For instance, we heard primarily positive reports from members of the SCAT Learning Community. Yet Marks had described two very different sections of comp from that community; one section he described as "great" and one as "passive and indifferent." The group from the SCAT LC that responded to invitations to focus groups were primarily from the former group so it is possible that we did not hear from those less engaged in the LC.

What makes for these differing reports of LC experiences? The shape of different Learning Communities is likely one factor in that the structures of some (e.g. smaller classes, particular assignments, linked Freshmen Seminar) may be more conducive to some of the things students value such as building social connections to other students. Another indicator is academic achievement. Tranice and particularly Elizabeth had lower grades in their LC classes than many of the students we interviewed. They did a grade level worse than the others in this community (averaging a C), and Elizabeth withdrew from the Math class. These grades could signal that the students were not as academically prepared as others we spoke with. It seems likely that students who have to struggle academically would be less positive about their experience. Another factor could be the expectations students bring to Learning Communities. For example, Michelle, who is profiled above, reported fairly minimal connections with other students but was satisfied with the social aspect of her LC. As residential students, Elizabeth and Tranice may have had higher expectations for the kinds of connections they would forge in LCs.

As in many other areas of academic life, commuters faced additional hurdles in drawing full benefit from Learning Communities. The experiences of Iris and Michelle illustrate how differently commuters and residents relate to the Temple environment. Like other commuters, Michelle struggled to find spaces to eat and congregate. All three commuters we shadowed found it difficult to think of a good place for an interview, i.e., to sit down and talk. It can also be hard to find people or friends on campus unless you happen to run into them. Further, many of the commuters we spoke to mentioned that they often have to leave Temple right after class to get to work; as a result, they don't tend to spend much time at Temple. Two commuters were exceptions to this story. Sarika was very active in a campus organization. Jay was planning to move on campus and to join a student association; he had met a large number of people through his study group in Rayna's class. Both spoke of having made connections to residential students with whom, at least occasionally, they stay overnight. For other less connected commuters, finding a place on campus (both literally and in terms of connections to individuals and groups) was an obstacle. Yet doing so seems key to students' feeling part of the Temple community or even recognizing that there is one.

Commuters in Learning Communities do not seem to have the same institutional

ties to the university. While all three commuters said on a survey⁶ that they felt connected to Temple's community, responses that were similar to those of residential students, only one of the six commuters we spoke to was part of a student association. All but one of the residential students were involved in at least one – and often more -- extracurricular activity.

Commuters in focus groups and interviews perceived residential students as having advantages. These included greater independence from parents, greater access to peers and social life, more chances for studying with others and an easier time with group work. Campus residents shared these perceptions. As one said, "I lived on campus, so I had access to things they didn't have access to. I could meet at certain times where they had to work or things like that so it kind of made it (meetings of her study group where all the other members were commuters) difficult. I saw the difference."

Nonetheless, all but one of the commuters we spoke to were very positive about their Learning Community experience. Those at the focus group agreed that Learning Communities can be a way to help commuters. Jay from SCAT said he wouldn't have known the people he knows now if it hadn't been for the Learning Community, "It kind of connected me to campus life even though I did commute."

3. Academic Aspects of Learning Communities

Students pointed to several aspects of Learning Communities that had enhanced their engagement with academics during their first semester at Temple. They felt that LC faculty were caring, effective and engaged. They talked of how the LC can enhance group work which in turn supported their learning. They appreciated the way LC professors coordinated assignments and workload within the community.

There was a strong consensus among students that Learning Community faculty are incredible teachers who are friendly and care about students. Carol, the white female commuter from the SBM, remarked in an interview:

[All three faculty members in the Learning Community] speak to us, like in our --not in our language, but on our level. ... So, I feel like the teachers are like, they try to help you and they want you to succeed, and if you feel you have any problems you can come to them.

Students spoke of faculty being "so helpful" and "friendly," of being "available" and "comfortable." Many students went to Learning Community faculty to discuss personal or career issues.

Those were the two teachers I was friendly with and who helped me out. (Ms. Thomas from the SBM FS) said 'you can always call me and come in to see me.'

⁶ These RFA surveys were completed only in focus groups by 3 commuters and 9 residents. Individual interviews took place with 3 commuters and 2 residents.

(Even though Thomas isn't her advisor), she still goes to her. She was available, and I felt comfortable. They told us you can just call us whenever you need to. I learned a lot from being in that ELECT class. She had the best ways of teaching us. (Sarika, Asian female student)

I've talked to Dr. Rayna about my career goals. He was talking with me about how psychology and advertising work hand in hand, so I might want to minor in psychology. If I bump into him now, I talk to him. He actually knows my name. (Jay, African-American male SCAT student)

In individual and focus group interviews, most students echoed this perception that Learning Community faculty knew and cared about them as individuals.

Some students indicated the academic and the social intersected in LCs. For example, like Jay below, some focus group participants commented that a key piece in the success of their group work was being familiar with one another:

You have to be comfortable with the people in your group to be able to do it. It [his best group experience] was our first outside project, but it wasn't our first project as a group. By then you were comfortable with them.

In addition, many students felt that having group projects helped with social connections. This was particularly true of group projects which extended out of class but was also true for some in their in-class peer review groups. As Sarika put it,

I think group projects made everybody know each other more. Gave us a sense of reliability on each other. We all planned to meet and usually we all showed up.

Some students found the logistics and social implications of such out of class group work difficult. The logistics of coordinating people's schedules was particularly difficult for commuters who struggled both with finding mutually convenient times to meet and with finding convenient places to meet. Nonetheless, the groups seem to have been successful in supporting a number of LC goals, e.g. helping members forge academic and/or social connections and supporting students' learning.

Although group work was the primary example of ways in which faculty tried to foster social connections between students around work, it was not the only way. Without some of the logistical barriers of study groups, e-mail holds promise for connecting commuters to the LC – at least those commuters that have easy access to computers. In one class telecommunications extended academic discussions between students. The professor established a list serve. After most classes he would write something about the discussion that had taken place in class. Students had the opportunity to comment on his reflections. Students were required to look at the list serve, and key information about the class was only available from the list serve to ensure this. One student commented that, "It was just really helpful to me because if I didn't understand something in class, then I

would seek someone else's point of view, someone else's understanding of it and that would help me understand it better." (Amy, Caucasian female SCAT student)

Some students found that Learning Communities helped them with their workload, and in particular that assignments were coordinated.

"I would say (to incoming freshmen) I think Learning Communities are good to get in because teachers work with each other. They know when each other are giving tough assignments. You learn more and meet people." (From Surveys)

Second semester freshman seemed to see this benefit more once they were no longer in Learning Communities; many found the second semester workload a challenge.

4. Social Connections and Learning Communities

The majority of students felt that Learning Communities had helped them connect with other students. Some of these connections were primarily in-class, whereas others extended to students lives outside the classroom.

Although many students saw Learning Communities as having a key social agenda, the social aspect of Learning Communities had a range of meanings for different students depending on the specific Learning Community, whether they were commuters or residents, and the extent of participation in projects outside of class.

Half the students surveyed thought that Learning Communities were primarily a way to meet other students.

Mostly, I see the Learning Community not as educational but more like a way for people to meet people because you're in college with 35,000 students. And it was a way for us to learn about other people, to make friends. Because when you're in different classes with different people, there's no time for you to sit down and actually make friends, where with this Learning Community, we met people. We're coming to a new school not knowing anybody, you know, big school, we're lost. And by being in a learning community, I don't know, you just kind of like interact better. (Carol, Caucasian Business Student)

The range of meanings of "social" was evident in the survey. Four questions addressed social aspects of Learning Communities -- two related to friendship connections and two related to social connections for academic purposes. Most of the students felt that they did know the students in the Learning Communities better than students in their other classes (Elizabeth and Tranice were the only ones to disagree), however, most of the group indicated that the people they spent time with on campus were not from Learning Communities. The discrepancy in the answers to these two questions suggested that students are dealing with differing kinds of peer connections. There seem to be two kinds of purely social connections, those within classes and those

outside of class. Connections forged in class do not necessarily extend out of class. Observations and interviews confirmed this interpretation.

In terms of social connections for academic purposes, two thirds of the group (like Michelle and Iris) said that they preferred to study alone, i.e. they did not use peer connections to support learning in this way. When asked whether they had studied with people from their Learning Community at least three times in the semester, there was an even split in responses. The qualitative data reveals a similar pattern; students who had projects or study groups outside of class were forced to make connections to students for academic purposes whereas students without that impetus studied alone.

Social connections within Learning Community classes were common; however, the extent of those social connections varied among Learning Communities. Class trips were particularly helpful in stimulating such social connections.

I got to know all of them from the Learning Community. Like we all knew each other's first names and everything and we went on a trip and everybody got to know each other really well. I had fun.

For many students these connections around academics didn't translate into socializing with members of the Learning Community outside of class. For some, however, it did. Jay met a woman in his Learning Community who in turn introduced him to her friends. This has become his social network. The experience of Carol was more common. Through the SBM Learning Community, Carol met people whom she sometimes spends time with between classes. She doesn't study with these students except when she's doing group projects. She primarily spends non-class time at Temple with people from her high school. She was not close to most of these students while they were in high school. She said she did not socialize much with people in her Learning Community, but she did report that on Fridays she takes the subway home with a friend from her LC. We also observed her inviting another LC friend to a New Year's Eve party. Thus, LCs seemed to be fostering some social connections for Carol, though her neighborhood and high school friends were still her primary support and friendship group.

Students who had done a group project which extended outside of class spoke of Learning Community friends being friends "for school purposes."

... when I did come to the Learning Community we were friends for school purposes. They were supportive. Everybody was trying to help each other out; that's why I wanted to be in it again. I never did anything outside of class with them. (Sarika, Asian female SBM student)

...the (SCAT) LC that we were in last semester encouraged the few of us to go on and join the same one this semester so we would all still be in the same classes. So now we're the same way. Our study habits are still as strong because we know we can call

each other if we need notes for this or that, you know. ... So like now, we'll get together and we'll still study on the same you know 'cause we all have the same major, we'll still study with the same habits that we were taught in our first semester [Learning Community] ...[Later on in the focus group she adds that she doesn't socialize with the people from the Learning Community]. Like we're friends and we all know that we enjoy taking classes together, but we're just not the same type of people. (Daria, African-American female student)

Group projects seemed to be key in fostering these social connections for academic purposes. For commuters and residential students alike these connections often focused on students' shared identity as learners.

Interviews with commuters suggested that many are not looking to make out-of-class friends. They already have friends with whom they socialize on the weekends and so forth.

It's [a Learning Community] good for one semester. It's good for people from out of state... The 10-15 people in the learning community are people that you know. It's easier for us commuters because we know people. People from NY, NJ don't know that many people. (Jay, African-American male SCAT student)

Commuters may be especially interested in making "friends for school purposes."

C. FACULTY

This section focuses on the experiences and perspectives of LC faculty. The seven findings draw on our observations in LC classrooms and on interviews with professors and GAs. Sometimes the voices of students and administrators appear when these provide additional context or a different perspective on an issue.

1. Learning Communities are flexible enough that individual professors and GAs can construct them to reflect their own interests and priorities.

Within the differing structures that characterize LCs in different schools, there is room for individual professors and GAs to shape LCs in ways that emphasize features that seem especially important to them. Professor Koller, for example, described his commitment to academic connections in LCs. He notes that initially he was somewhat uninformed about LCs, assuming they were primarily social. "I kept saying to Dan (Tompkins) why don't you have something academic that they're doing in this LC. It might be something as simple as a two page paper that they write at the end of the semester where they give an academic connection between the two classes.... You might not even attach a grade to it, but at least get them to see what we are trying to do here is to merge these two classes at some academic level." In his LC course, he instituted an assignment that linked the two classes and, with the GAs, organized a weekly coffee hour that involved GAs from both courses, himself, and students. Professor Rayna, in contrast,

invested his energy in innovations in his own class, e.g. more group projects and using e-mail with students to extend class discussions and raise new questions. It's possible that given the multiple possible emphases for a LC and a limited amount of time that faculty need to make some strategic choices about which aspects of LC to emphasize at any given time; of course, those emphases could change over time.

2. All of the professors and graduate assistants we interviewed reported that teaching in a Learning Community had affected their pedagogy and/or their perspective on teaching and learning in some way.⁷ Professors and GAs reported some similar kinds of effects, but their differing status as teachers (e.g. relatively experienced vs. new/apprentice) shaped their experience differently. Professors, with more teaching experience and a longer term commitment to Temple, were particularly energized by the experience; it seemed to provide an opportunity and an impetus to reinvent aspects of their teaching.

Several respondents reported that teaching an all freshmen class in an intentional way through the Learning Communities program had given them a different vantage point on their subject or their students. Ms. Oscar, a law student and GA in the Law and Society lecture, explained, "I was forced to step back and look at the law from fresh eyes... There were some students who asked to come to some of our classes at the law school. It sort of took away my cynicism and it made me look at it (law) as I did when I was a first year." While Ms. Newman felt that she didn't teach her ELECT Learning Community class differently than non-Learning Community ones, she did note that teaching the linked class had made her think in a more interdisciplinary way, i.e. she thinks more about where students are going and what writing they will need. She felt it had also make her "more aware of things that come in to play when teaching (e.g. students' jobs, retention issues). I am more understanding of students as I teach them, not that I let them turn papers in late, but I've gained more of a student perspective." The experience seemed to have broadened her sense of who students are and what they need to succeed academically.

In all three Learning Communities, faculty said that because of their course's affiliation with the program, they initiated group work or used groups in new ways. Newman, who always uses peer response and work groups when she teaches, said that the smaller size of Learning Community classes enabled her to initiate more group work and to do a better job of coordinating it. In the SCAT Learning Community, Rayna had done group projects before in his classes; in the Learning Community, he also introduced study groups which worked on other group assignments. Professor Koller noted that he tried something he'd never done in a large math class – organizing students into small groups for a joint in-class project. Though his previous experience had indicated that groups wouldn't work in a large class until the second semester, these groups "took off." He

⁷ The only person who did not report this effect was Ms. Thomas, an advisor in the business school who taught the Freshmen Seminar. It was her first semester in the job and her first semester teaching.

feels students are more receptive to groups in Learning Communities.

Two GAs in the Arts and Sciences Community reported that using groups in the LC context encouraged them to use groups more in other contexts. During the fall 96 semester, Sliwinski tried to use more group activities in his LC sections because of their tie to the program. Then, he became concerned that he was denying his non LC students the opportunity to succeed so he began using group activities with them as well. Koller had had his math GAs do group exercises involving time management and study skills in their recitation sections. After trying small group work in this way, Simmons added group activities focused on math work to his spring 97 classes. Both had been novices in working with groups.

Professors in two LCs made innovations in their approach to a course and were so pleased with the results that they incorporated many of the changes into non-learning community courses. The changes introduced by Lattimer, the law professor, clustered largely around course organization, e.g. he made attendance mandatory, did more follow up with students who were having trouble (both through his GAs or himself and through the advising office) and assigned GAs to particular groups of students for the entire semester, rather than having them relate to students more randomly. He credited these innovations with students' high academic achievement – “half a grade better than any students I've ever had here.” He was continuing the mandatory attendance and increased follow up with students (by himself and GAs) in the spring semester. In addition to increased use of groups, Rayna arranged a trip to New York, sometimes called students when they were absent, and used e-mail with his students to extend classroom discussions and raise new questions. He noted that what really intrigued him was “I felt my mind turning around a little bit and in fact the way I treated that class in the fall is the way I'm trying to treat the students in this class now, although it's not a Learning Communities class. I felt like I was a much better teacher.” In addition to specific changes, Rayna described a different teaching stance – treating students differently -- that he now tries to replicate in other classes.

Faculty members from each Learning Community expressed excitement about the experience and sometimes a sense of renewal in their teaching; graduate assistants, in contrast, often were trying to master initial teaching experiences or were preparing to leave Temple and so seemed to have a different relation to their teaching. Marks, a relatively experienced GA who was finishing his degree and looking for a job, noted that during the semester we observed, he had less time and energy for teaching than Rayna, the professor of the linked class. A department chair described the situation of many less experienced GAs working in Learning Communities, “They're so new to teaching and feel there's so much they have to cover so (I don't) have a great sense there was as much change in their teaching...If you haven't taught much and your basic goal is to get through the course, you're not open to experimentation and if you're not teaching permanently (at Temple), the investment to do things differently isn't there.” This same faculty member had recently taught an Intellectual History course linked to another course in his department. He said, “In many ways it was more stimulating to me to teach this

kind of course because the material was material I was really going back to and because it was a smaller freshmen course than I could teach otherwise...(I think) just about any faculty member finds the idea (of Learning Communities) philosophically exciting.” Rayna said that teaching Learning Community classes has helped him “reinvent (his teaching) methodology. It gave him an “impetus to think more innovatively and to involve them (students) as individuals. It’s beneficial for students and faculty.” Both of these professors describe the experience of teaching a Learning Communities class as stimulating and as an opportunity for change.

3. In discussing the goals of Learning Communities, many faculty talked of helping students successfully make the transition from high school to college. They voiced a range of expectations about what students already know and what they need to know and about their own role in supporting this transition. Some GAs seemed unsure of how to help less prepared students.

Professors and Graduate Assistants expect that students will need help negotiating the transition to college, especially because Temple is such a large university. They speak of the purpose of Learning Communities as “easing freshmen” into the university (psychology GA), as making the university seem smaller so students don’t feel lost (ELECT teacher), as helping students feel comfortable during their first semester at Temple (Advisor teaching Freshmen Seminar) and as helping students be successful in their college careers (SCAT professor). While many emphasized the importance of this transition, few talked specifically about what supports or knowledge students might need to make it.

Not surprisingly, some faculty identified the atmosphere of Learning Community classes and the work habits of its students as more like high school. An administrator who had taught a LC class noted that since most core courses draw students from different years, this had been the first time he taught all freshmen. “It was different...it was high school.” For example, he noted that often it is difficult to get students in a core course to talk, whereas in the LC it was hard to get them to stop talking and he had to do much more work with group dynamics than usual. Newman said of a student she had recommended for shadowing: She was “typical of some of the students I’m referring to who struggled with the transition from high school to college, in terms of gaining that academic perspective...(whose) work habits and school attitude is like high school.” She felt this was typical of Temple students. Their comments raise questions about what specifically students need to know and do to become more like college students and what might help faculty facilitate this growth.

When they talked about students’ negotiation of this transition and their own expectations, some faculty located problems in students’ inadequacies, some struggled with how to reframe their expectations as a result of their teaching experience and some articulated that socializing freshmen into being college students was part of a teacher’s role. Koller noted that many faculty “blame students for not having study skills (but he feels)...teachers need to teach students how to learn in college.” Hutchins, the

psychology GA explained that she didn't want to have low expectations for her students, but she was unsure how to reconcile her desire to have high expectations with the realities of many students' lives (i.e. especially commuters who have work and family obligations). A few GAs compared students at Temple unfavorably with those at other institutions, e.g. because they didn't utilize GA office hours or because they lack motivation or don't have the "right attitude." Sliwinski was particularly frustrated by his attempts at using group work. He thought the students acted like they "didn't know how to do that." The first time they "just looked around like 'what's a group?'" He later noted, though, that he was still learning how to manage groups.

Some faculty consciously scaffolded their courses in ways that would help freshmen become successful college students. Two math GAs noted that they were trying to "tie in being in the Learning Community with being more academically motivated." For example, both talked with their groups about how to read the math textbook; one had the group share how they prepared for exams. While Lattimer did not change the way he taught his class for the LC, he believed that its format (using audio-visual equipment to highlight key concepts and definitions during the lecture) could help students learn how to prepare for college courses and could teach them study habits. Thomas, the SBM advisor who taught the FS, was very aware of her role trying to socialize freshmen into being college students. After hearing from Lattimer that students were talking too much in his lecture, Thomas had a discussion with her class about how to act in a large lecture class.

Faculty identify a different quality in all freshmen classes and are aware of the LC program goal of helping freshmen become more successful students. Many faculty seek to support this transition with a range of specific strategies. A few GAs fault students for acting inappropriately which they blamed on students' deficiencies. These GAs do not seem to believe they have a role in helping students adapt.

4. Across the board, faculty described Learning Community students as more connected to their peers than those in non Learning Community classes. They cited a number of outcomes of this increased connection, some of which (including speaking out more, having greater confidence to ask questions, being more receptive to group work) enhance the academic experience and some of which concern them (such as uniting in resistance to academic work).

All the faculty talked about how Learning Community classes exhibit greater social cohesion, i.e. more students seem to know each other, there is more talking, or there's a stronger group identity. Rayna noted, "in this class, people are talking to each other when you walk in; that's not common at Temple." A psychology GA said an LC class is the one that she can hear as she walks down the hall toward the class.

Faculty described a number of ways that these closer peer relations seem to support the students' learning:

LC students are more forthright and talkative. (Newman)

Their studying becomes more effective when they know there's a group they can work with. (Thomas)

LC students are more confident and have more courage to express opinions. (Lattimer)

Students were able to talk about controversial issues with energy and without anger. (Marks)

LC students speak out and challenge me more in class (which she saw as positive). (psychology GA).

They feel more confident to ask questions....They seem to know each other better. There was a lot of give and take (which he is now trying to build into non Learning Community classes). (Rayna).

Students more often resist group work; they are more receptive to groups in the Learning Community...It was easier to get students to see outside of class, beyond math. (Because social relations are already part of the LC) it's easier to help them see that all we do has application to other courses and their personal lives. (Koller)

Thus, faculty attribute a range of effects to the social networks supported by Learning Communities, including increased student confidence and resulting ease in asking questions and expressing opinions, improved and sometimes more critical discussion, and a more conducive environment for group work.

Some faculty indicated that the greater sociability of Learning Community classes can also make teaching them more challenging. Lattimer described increased talking during class. Marks noted that, "students enjoy the social aspect and this can offer "students the opportunity to resist intellectual content. Some comp teachers identify LC classes with going to class for other reasons than to work." Newman said that because students are in a LC they're "so open with each other and know each other, (and) they feel they have a little power." So they sometimes challenge her in ways other students don't.

In separate interviews, different members of Marks's class told stories of bonding with other class members to challenge him. Iris explained that her study group from Rayna's class tends to sit together in Marks's. "But we do this thing. If one person raises a point and the teacher disagrees, our girl will back us up. We do this little signal. It's so funny....And he (Marks) asked me about it. He knows. He's like, 'Do you guys do that on purpose?' I was like, 'Oh, no.'" Daria felt the group had pushed Marks to change his teaching style. "I think it (LC) makes it easier for the professor because I

think Prof. Marks, he had a hard time with the way we wanted to learn as opposed to, he was very, very ready to like, 'all right you're in college now. This is how you're going to take notes and you do your work and you hand it in.' And the way that our LC was going we were like 'no we want more' and because we demanded more with him, it kind of made him realize his particular teaching style wasn't going over well with us. So he tried again you know. And I think it was mostly because of the LC and what we demanded of him." Though both students are describing a situation of some resistance, they seem to have been using the resistance to engage more academically. Iris clearly enjoyed the memory of challenging her teacher and Daria seemed to feel a sense of empowerment at having gotten a teacher to adjust his style to her and others' learning needs. Both these students were from the section that Marks described as great and he described Iris as "very self-reflective. She took her education and socialization seriously." Thus, the incidents described by Iris and Daria seem to fit into what Marks describes as community being established in conjunction with an emphasis on academics. He and Newman are troubled by communities established in "opposition to academics."

Both Newman and Marks noted that the group dynamic in Learning Communities can work in a variety of ways. In one class Newman taught the group dynamic "made them all better students." In other classes it has sometimes been negative. Marks has often taught two LC classes per semester and found that often the group dynamic worked very differently in the two. In one, the focus on relationships often creates a group which bonds in opposition to academics and in the other it does not. Thus, during fall 96, while one group was able to discuss controversial issues, the other was more fragmented along lines of race and gender. Both instructors were unsure how to affect this group dynamic and how to channel it into more uniformly positive directions. Marks attributed these differences in part to "the luck of enrollment."

5. Most faculty found that despite the enhanced connections among students, it was difficult to schedule out of class social or academic activities. Those extra activities which were most successful had an academic component.

Many faculty spoke of the difficulty of scheduling academic or social activities outside of class hours, especially given the high percentage of commuting students with other responsibilities at Temple. Some teachers chose not to invest energy in setting up social activities. Members of the psychology and math LC teaching team had been particularly interested in scheduling social activities and did have a weekly coffee hour. While a small number of students came to the coffee hour, it became a place for the teachers to talk and exchange views. Simmons explained that he had seen resistance to social activities and Koller explained that although he had hoped students would become involved with the social aspect of the LC, he had found they had their own friends and social life. Hutchins indicated that her students said they joined the LC to find people to study with, rather than to socialize with. She found though that students' inflexible schedules prevented organizing study groups and that ultimately they simply shared phone numbers.

Two classes did have out-of-class activities that both students and faculty seemed to consider successful and both were connected to academics, rather than purely social. Both were optional. The law and society class members could choose to participate in one of two extra credit projects – serving as jury members for mock trials at the U.S. district court or viewing (and then writing about) the movie Dead Man Walking. The SCAT class took a bus together to New York to attend a talk show. This more ambitious trip seemed to have had a particularly strong impact. Two students discussed it in an interview.

Iris: The trip to New York was cool....It was like a bonding experience. We talked to Dr. Rayna for two hours on the way back.

Ginette: And another thing about that, trip... Sometimes I know somebody here and then once you do something different, like take a trip, you see this whole new side like, what is that? That was really good. (Iris: Yeah.) Our friends that we did the study group with we kind of hung out with them in New York. We were like, So, okay, let's see what this is like, you know? And that was really good. You see like different sides of people because of that trip.

It's possible that students felt more able and more motivated to make time in their schedules for events connected to their work as students. At the same time, such events hold the possibility of deepening participants' personal relationships with students and/or faculty.

6. Graduate Assistants play a central role in many Learning Communities. Professor-GA collaboration in all three communities supported some faculty in aspects of their work and benefited their students. Because of role differences between GAs and faculty and limits on GAs role and power, it can be difficult for GAs and professors to work together as equals. This affects the possibilities for what LCs can be and do. Extensive use of GAs in Learning Communities may support the growth and development of GAs as teachers; it does not further the goal of changing faculty culture.

Because many Learning Communities are structured around writing classes (Comp, ELECT) or core courses, graduate students play an important role in the program. The majority of writing courses are taught by graduate students and many large core courses are subdivided into smaller recitation sections facilitated by GAs. Due to the size of these sections, interactions among students and between students and GAs can be more personal in nature there than in a large lecture. In one of the communities we observed, the professors of a large core class (psychology) were not even involved in the Learning Community, so the GA-led recitation sections were the LC for that course.

Some administrators see the large role played by GAs as primarily positive. For example, one noted that it bolsters the GA's training experience and offers an opportunity for the GA to be in communication with faculty about teaching issues and problems. In

the communities we studied, we saw GAs and professors working together productively in ways that they felt benefited themselves, their courses and their students. Marks noted that working in an LC has enabled him to interact with professors in a different way, more as a colleague. He thought these kinds of connections enabled one to learn how to communicate with people in other disciplines. He also felt that he had been lucky in terms of professors with whom he collaborated; two out of three were respectful and treated him as a colleague. Simmons, a math GA, called Koller a “good mentor because he is interested in students (GAs) getting into teaching.” Some of this mentoring would likely have taken place with the GAs facilitating sections of Koller’s class even if it were an independent course. The coffee hours that were part of the Learning Community, however, provided a weekly forum for psychology and math GAs to interact with Koller and each other about teaching and students. Sliwinski, a psychology GA, said that the coffee hours were more successful “for Dr. Koller, (another psychology GA), and I than for students...(Relatively few students came and those that did were assisted by math GAs.) We talked about how courses could come together...He (Koller) had a lot of energy...It was nice to see a teacher really fired up about it (teaching).”

Yet even those GAs with positive experiences working with professors named constraints they felt in their own role or ways they had seen such constraints play out for others. GAs leading recitation sections felt constrained by the limits of their role. Both psychology and math GAs in the Arts and Sciences LC met with classes only weekly and had to spend much of their time reviewing material to prepare students for exams and actually giving exams. Simmons noted that the construction of the course (with Koller making up quizzes and giving suggestions for review problems) meant that he was more of a reviewer than a teacher. He found he could only slightly supplement the professor’s assignments. Sliwinski said that although initially he felt the psychology class was “a little bit too structured to allow for a whole lot of creativity” (on his part), he now saw how he could play more of a role. However, he felt his primary role involved “drilling students to do well on the exam” and he suggested using a psychology class with a different structure for LC affiliation.

Comp GAs work as independent teachers, but they and others with experience with the writing program also voiced concern about the possibilities for collaboration in LCs involving writing GAs. These concerns related to the differing power and status that characterize GA and professor roles at the university, to the low status of comp as a subject, to limits inherent in the current structure of comp and to the perception that comp should change to make any links between classes.

An administrator associated with writing programs noted that 70-80% of writing classes are taught by GAs and continued,

(I)t’s not a reflection on quality of teaching, many GAs are devoted students and teachers. Especially after a year or two, many get to be very good teachers, but there are two big problems...: there is always a power differential built in if the TA is working with a prof in the other course. It would be very rare for them to

operate as peers even if faculty members want it to be that way. Secondly grad students by nature are transitory teachers. Very often when teaching comp only a small percentage think this is what they want to be teaching. Most of them see themselves as literature teachers primarily. It's true many come to be interested in comp (and leave just as they get skills. We can handle this better through better training and support.)...The best way to get harmony between two courses is to have peers cooperating and for them to have time.

Marks, the only GA writing teacher we interviewed, said that some professors don't appreciate the independence and experience of comp GAs who do Learning Communities; he thinks some professors are much better at working with GAs than others.

The issue of GA turnover is relevant in another way. Even if GAs and professors forge productive working relationships, prospects for teaching together again are unclear. For example, GAs in the linked psychology and math communities who had spent time exploring possible connections between their courses, did not know if they would be able to work together again, but thought doing so would strengthen their Learning Community. As mentioned earlier, some administrators with responsibility for scheduling underlined its complications (especially in Arts and Sciences) and expressed concern about losing the flexibility they need if there was the expectation that linked classes would become "permanent configurations." To the extent that repeating Professor-GA pairings is possible, it might also address concerns that LCs increase workload in that the teachers would already have created some links between their classes and done some of the necessary structuring of their courses.

In general university comp classes are sometimes perceived by professors and GAs as undesirable to teach (the writing administrator alludes to this above) and as fairly devoid of content; some people associated with comp felt that many professors assumed that the comp class should be the one to change to make linked courses a Learning Community. Newman explained that it would be difficult if the linked teacher assumed that "writing is writing. As long as they write it doesn't matter." She noted that in general people think that comp can simply accommodate to whatever the material is and that when a GA is teaching this is particularly thought to be true. She noted that she sometimes felt the "power gap" because of her (younger) age but that as a dean's appointment she felt she had the authority and power to say no. In the SBM LC there did seem to be the expectation that any linking would be done by writing teachers, with whom Lattimer shared this syllabus. Newman was open to this kind of linking; she used Lattimer's theme to shape her own topics in comp; she did not, however, want types of assignments and connections dictated to her. Marks too had adopted aspects of the topic in his linked class. He underlined that he did so because he was interested in it and that although faculty often assume comp instructors will do the changing, he thinks other classes and disciplines should also be willing to do so. One administrator who has taught an LC echoed these concerns, noting that there is often an attitude that GAs and comp should do the merging in a LC; he thinks that everybody should bend in an integrated LC.

A last issue related to comp involves the structure of writing classes. An administrator who had worked closely with comp GAs from his discipline to link their classes explained that the fact that comp is so standardized limited their options for linking. "If instructors could refashion (comp) there would be more possibilities." Marks explained that the need to prepare for an in-class departmental exam at the end of the semester limited possibilities in his LC course. "The last 4-6 weeks you're struggling against an outside force. You can't build up longer more complex assignments; it's not possible to have a capstone." He and the professor of the linked course had discussed a joint assignment at the end, but ultimately Marks felt he "couldn't do a funky, original assignment" because of the need to prepare students for the exam. "At the end you're roped in to do things in response to outside demand, not the other class." The writing program at Temple was in the process of being revised during this research. One change lets instructors choose between portfolios and an exam at the end of the course. This and other changes may open up new possibilities for collaboration.

Lastly, the extensive involvement of GAs in Learning Communities raises one additional question. Some administrators hope that LCs will help to change faculty culture, e.g. by encouraging faculty to value undergraduate education, by encouraging faculty to see that instructing freshmen includes playing a role in acclimating them to the university and its demands, and by encouraging faculty collaboration. Yet, as one administrator said, "collaborating with GAs doesn't change faculty culture. It may make the GA faculty better but Temple doesn't benefit since GAs leave." Linked courses taught by two professors may open up more possibilities to address this goal as well as increasing the potential for a higher degree of collaboration.

7. Faculty and administrators identified several institutional barriers that they felt hindered faculty involvement in Learning Communities. They include the culture of commuting, requirements which work against faculty choosing to teach smaller classes, and the pull to invest time in research rather than teaching.

A number of faculty and administrators referred to the culture of commuting at Temple and indicated that it affects faculty as well as students. In that the LC program seeks to involve professors more deeply in the lives of students and seeks to build communities on campus, it is working to change an aspect of faculty and school culture. "Faculty at Temple are like students – they come in and go home. LCs force faculty to relate in ways they normally don't...LCs are a corrective to that (the culture of commuting); they're not reinforced by faculty culture" (Arts & Sciences Administrator, 3/26/97).

One professor connected the commuting issue to the on-going need for faculty to publish and research; with limited time on campus, the pull not to invest in teaching can be strong. "The Temple dynamic is very difficult. There's this sense of you go to class and get out. It pervades everything. It pervades faculty. It pervades students. I think it's not uncommon. I don't think it's peculiar to Temple....It might be an urban situation; it might be the kind of things that go on in the lives of constituencies. Faculty have to

publish and research. How do you get that done? Well you're not going to get it done talking to students. That's a hindrance to LCs. They're trying to do something about it and I think it's been successful that way. In some ways it's like swimming against a tide."

One administrator talked of how increasing faculty workloads at Temple have made faculty more reluctant to volunteer for Learning Community courses since doing so could mean having a heavier teaching load. "We had many faculty say, 'but I can't teach a small class because that means I'm going to have to teach a small class in addition to it.'" This happens when professors are expected to teach a certain number of students and an LC class size is under the minimum number. She believes this issue may be handled differently in different departments. In some the professor might have to teach two other courses in addition to the LC. In other departments choosing to support faculty teaching in LCs, they might simply make sure the departmental average class size is on target, i.e. if other people are teaching larger lectures.

D. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS/STRUCTURES

1. The Learning Communities Office and staff received high marks in terms of accessibility, commitment and the support offered to Learning Community faculty.

All the faculty we spoke to as well as many administrators who worked with the Learning Communities Office spoke positively of their shared work.

In general they're supportive in ways that are hard to articulate....little things like working out room problems, connecting us to people to speak with about such things. ...If I need something, I know they'll do their best to help you. (Newman, Comp teacher)

My experience with (the LC office) made it easier for my part to succeed because (they) would always keep us informed. He (Dan) would always bring us together with other people. He would leave voice messages on the machine to see how things were going. You get calls from GAs over there about luncheons and different kinds of things. I've been very happy with that part of the university....It (contact with LC office) really made me feel I was doing something special. It's not here's your project go do it. We're constantly getting feedback from the LC coordinators....I knew that I wasn't just thrown into something, that there was somebody really caring what I was doing and would check up to see if I had any problems. I thought that was really beneficial. (Lattimer, professor in SBM LC)

We have the most cooperation and enthusiasm from the LC office for students. It's the easiest thing for us to do. The LC office and the way they present themselves to students and the way they try to get students involved in them has been good; they work really hard. I don't know any other department that opens up more classes for people as the summer goes along. (Student orientation leader)

(He has some contact with the LC office about scheduling) The relationship with the LC office has always been beautiful. It's a difficult job for them but not for me. It's all done for me. (Arts and Sciences Department Head)

In general, LC stakeholders seemed to think that the LC office was responsive, efficient, available to answer any queries they might have, worked hard to stay in touch with them, and was generally supportive of their efforts (whether they were professors, GAs, department heads, administrators or involved in student orientation).

Those GAs and professors who had participated in an initial orientation or faculty development session had found them most useful for learning about Learning Communities and meeting those teaching courses linked with theirs. In some cases, people were able to set up mechanisms for coordinating with each other, e.g. about students, at the orientation. Some people found that orientations did not directly help them with teaching their course.

In talking about other kinds of support they would like from the LC office, several faculty wanted opportunities to learn from others' experiences teaching LC classes. Marks suggested that the LC office could collect assignments and syllabi from LC Comp classes to help Comp teachers reorganize their classes and try different things. He thought it would be especially helpful to know how people linked assignments to math and science courses. In a similar vein, Prof. Rayna suggested sharing "lessons from the front lines," e.g. about saving faculty or student time or things that build community, in newsletter form. He wanted to know more about the specifics of what people do in their classes (teamwork and community building, esteem building) and about statistics re what happens to students in different classes; he thought some of this material would also be useful at orientation.

2. A strength of the LC program is that it draws broad support from different schools and programs and from people variously situated in Temple administrative roles. Many people see the LC effort supporting their own work. Some of these people have fairly minimal knowledge of what actually happens in LCs.

People situated in very different roles in Temple's administrative structures spoke positively about the goals and performance of the LC program and, often, of how it supports the work of their own office.

As an administrator I like the LC idea because it foregrounds community as a value. I think it is a difficult thing to accommodate within the structure of Temple, the faculty and lives of graduate students....I think from the point of view of what Temple needs to be supporting and standing for, even if it doesn't do the best things for academic achievement, the LC program is good thing. (Arts and Sciences Administrator)

I like Temple's idea of connecting major core courses. Students have to see

themselves as connectors, to suck in other experiences. Too many students see core courses as something they take with no connection. The best thing we could do for students is to help them learn that all this stuff is stuff they can use. Higher education needs connective type courses (which) try to synthesize different things. Everyone doesn't do it automatically. You can learn to be open to those connections; part of what education should do is show you the glory of those moments. (SCAT department head)

I saw this program as a great stepping stone towards that philosophy of making sure that each student gets reached at an optimal level. (Koller, Arts and Sciences LC professor)

(He sees Learning Communities as having a similar purpose to his work in residential life --) to give students enough positive experiences, in a smaller setting. (Administrator)

It's very helpful to us because one of the fears of potential students is Temple's size and that they'll get lost. It's helpful to talk about LC with an average size of 24. It takes some of the fear away....They're always pleased. They like to hear more about it. (Admissions office staff)

I think they're a very important aspect of students' freshmen year; it's another way to involve freshmen right off on campus. (Ambler dean)

(Teaching students) survival skills (is a goal of LCs)... Over a semester, LCs provide important pieces of orientation (including information on violence and sex abuse)... Students have access to information when they need it (such as information on strategies for note taking, studying for exams, pre-registration)... LCs make the campus smaller. It makes university more like high school in that it provides an opportunity for students to get to know more students on a smaller scale. (Administrator, Student Affairs)

These assessments cut across a wide span of roles at the university and involvement in the LC program, with some respondents having a history of significant involvement in the LC program (e.g. involved in its creation, experience teaching LC classes) and others involved only peripherally. While this latter group was generally supportive of the LC effort, their knowledge of the program was limited. For example, one Arts and Sciences Department Head described himself as "totally in favor of Learning Community." He stated that his "general impression is they are trying to form a community here" but he was not clear on the specifics of how this is accomplished or how effective the effort is. The support of this latter group certainly contributes to the breadth of support for LCs, but it may not be that deep, given that it is not based on extensive personal involvement or knowledge.

Administrators emphasize a range of goals for LCs. Some focus on the ways it

connects with their own work, e.g. helping students learn survival skills. Others see it as a retention effort, or foreground community as a value. On the one hand this is one aspect of the program's strength. Yet, the wide array of goals with which administrators and faculty invest LCs raise some questions about the stance of the LC program toward this issue of goals. Are some goals priorities across the board or are participants free to emphasize different goals to meet the varying needs of students, professors, courses, departments and schools?

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This evaluation research reveals a number of accomplishments of the Temple Learning Communities program. Some of those that stand out are:

- (1) The vast majority of students involved in our study (80%) found that LCs supported their transition to a large university. They could name specific ways that participating had been helpful for them.
- (2) Learning Communities are having an impact on student experience in the areas the program seeks to address. These include fostering social and academic ties to peers, building closer connections with faculty and encouraging a sense that students are part of a larger community at Temple. The data also illustrate ways that some of these goals were enacted differently among Learning Communities.
- (3) Learning Communities are able to have a powerful effect on the pedagogy and teaching stance of LC faculty, especially professors.
- (4) Learning Communities have the potential to enable interdisciplinary linkage between courses and faculty collaboration.

This final section of the report offers recommendations and questions to consider as the program seeks to build on its strengths and address areas for growth.

A. The Shape of Learning Communities

1. More intensive focus on group work.

Group work seems to function as a particularly effective way of meeting both social and academic ends in Learning Communities. The data show that being in an LC facilitated group work and projects for students and that such work often enhanced their understanding of a subject. It also indicated that group work could help students get to know each other and could help them build a social network.

The LC office already provides professional development for LC faculty during the summer. Interviews indicated the need to provide additional and/or more focused professional development opportunities related to fostering group work. Some teachers and GAs are relatively new to group work and especially to using it in ways that facilitate the wider social and academic purposes of LCs. More experienced teachers might be able to serve as mentors – in development sessions and/or outside of them. Another possibility would be to create forums for teachers to share their successes, questions, and problems related to group work and simply to exchange ideas about how to set up and use groups.

Another aspect of supporting group work involves helping students and faculty to address some of the logistical issues that sometimes hinder group work. It can be hard for groups to find a place to meet and for commuters to find time to meet. The LC office might compile a list of places groups can meet. For example, one residential student believed she could not bring her group into the dorms because of a limit on how many students a resident can bring in at one time; she was not aware that one can get permission to bring in a study group. Though the LC program cannot overcome some students' inflexible schedules, an innovation in the Business School addresses one way of creating time for students to meet. They have instituted a "free period" around lunchtime; during this time no classes meet. It is a time when student organizations can meet and when work groups frequently get together. E-mail and other technology have the potential to overcome some of these obstacles as well. Groups could meet on-line to share reactions to class readings and discussion and to develop projects. Lastly, students often need support to work together productively in groups and to overcome the personality and other issues that can arise; faculty development could prepare faculty to teach students about working together.

2. Support and encourage teachers in making interdisciplinary connections between courses.

Though there is a strong sense at Temple that mandating interdisciplinary LCs would be a mistake, many of those we interviewed (administrators, teachers and students) also articulated the benefits of these kinds of linkages. The LC office could consider a number ways of supporting this kind of course development and teacher collaboration.

Professors and GAs who have had good experiences with interdisciplinary Learning Communities are powerful messengers of the excitement this can generate. The LC office could create ways for them to share their experience.

The LC program could continue to support the development of new course combinations, as scheduling and student registration permit.

The program could provide incentives for faculty to create new interdisciplinary combinations or to strengthen existing, oft-repeated combinations of courses. Incentives could include additional pay and time, e.g. release time. For example, faculty could work on developing the links between math and chemistry or math and psychology. GAs and/or professors could develop (and share already existing) syllabi and assignments as well as simply articulating the conceptual and content overlap of the courses. These materials could then serve as resources from which new people teaching these courses could pick and choose.

The program could consider creating more communities that feature two professors or a professor and GA from the same discipline, since such linkages can facilitate interdisciplinary work. One way to do this would be to link Intellectual History courses to a course taught by someone in the IH professor's discipline. These might be

especially appropriate as second semester courses.

The LC program could provide time, e.g. during orientation or in addition to it, for faculty of linked courses to work together. In particular, they might emphasize that students' may miss interdisciplinary links unless they are clearly articulated.

3. Continue experimenting with the Freshmen Seminar.

Across different schools and models, the Freshmen Seminar is very much a program in the midst of developing and changing. Administrators affirm its importance and students indicate that it is meeting some needs. Continued dialogue among those responsible for the Seminar in different schools can promote the exchange of ideas and learning from each other. In Arts and Sciences, the program needs to experiment with ways to build in a stronger sense of community; in fall 1997, the School is scheduling FS twice weekly for half the semester and this greater level of intensity may support community building. In all three schools, administrators need to continue communicating with students about why the "non-academic" content of FS is important and useful to them. The Business School's model of tying the FS to academic advisors and to using one's time at Temple to prepare for a career seems especially promising.

4. Reflect on the shape of LCs at Temple

Learning Communities at Temple have evolved over time. One strength of LCs is that they are flexible enough to bend in different ways to emphasize different purposes and needs. Now (with the ending of the initial grant and this report) could be a good time to engage LC stakeholders at Temple in dialogue about LCs and their role at Temple. In particular, those most involved in the LC program could consider the meaning of the program's multiple goals. Should the same one or two goals be emphasized in every community? Or, within the structure of two (or more) linked classes, are faculty free to emphasize different goals? In the latter case, the office might want to clearly articulate the various options to teachers, as well as what it looks like in practice to emphasize interdisciplinary connections or student-faculty and student-student relationships? Of course, these varying goals are not mutually exclusive and in practice tend to build on each other. The latter option does allow faculty to build on their interests and the needs of their department, students or discipline to create LCs which emphasize different aspects of program; this could be featured as strength in faculty recruitment

5. Consider experimenting on a small scale with some innovations of the LC model.

Although these issues were not discussed at length in the report, some administrators, faculty and students raised questions about ways Learning Communities could be altered or enlarged to reach other students or to build on current work. These suggestions included creating some LCs specifically for transfers and/or older students, creating some year-long communities and expanding LC offerings in Spring semester.

B. Enhancing Students' Experience of Learning Communities

1. Experiment with new ways to get the message about Learning Communities to students.

The Learning Community program should work to make sure that the benefits of LCs are heard more clearly and consistently by in-coming freshman. The following suggestions were made by students:

- Re-consider orientation as the primary place for communication about Learning Communities since students are likely to be overwhelmed at that time.
- At orientations, use students who have been in Learning Communities to communicate the message rather than advisors because “they’re [in-coming students] more apt to believe students who’ve actually been involved.”
- Emphasize the full-range of benefits of the Learning Community program to counteract the possible negative reactions to a perceived high-school-like quality of linked courses.

2. Address needs of commuters within LCs.

The data show that LCs met important social and academic needs of both commuters and residential students. Yet, as with their college experience generally, commuters faced additional barriers to having a satisfying experience. The program should consider ways to meet the particular needs of commuters.

The data show the challenges that commuters face in simply finding a place, e.g. to socialize, study, meet with a study group, at Temple. The program could help students identify existing spaces and/or could consider providing a special space for commuters who are part of Learning Communities on campus. Again, e-mail might provide a way to link commuters and residents across space and time.

Given that some commuters do not (at least initially) seem to be seeking social connections that extend outside of the classroom, the program could refine its message related to the academic benefits of Learning Communities and the ways that social connections within a class support learning and academic achievement. (Many residential students would also respond to this message.)

C. Supporting Faculty Involvement in Learning Communities

1. Articulate incentives to LC involvement and address barriers.

Strengthening faculty involvement could benefit the program in several ways. It encourages the vision of professors teaching freshmen, may make different kinds of collaborations possible (i.e. when two peers teach a LC), and is more likely to change faculty culture. It would also further build the program’s constituency.

The program should spread the word about the exciting possibilities LCs open for faculty, both for their own development as teachers and for their students' learning and socialization as college students. The program could use some of the findings of this report in such an effort. In addition, it should use faculty who have taught in LCs to spread the word about Learning Communities in their departments and schools.

Communicating the benefits of LC involvement may help to counter some of the disincentives also cited in this report, e.g. the culture of commuting and time pressures. One specific barrier the university could address to strengthen LCs is the requirement that professors teach certain numbers of students per semester. This penalizes faculty who volunteer for LC classes and then must teach an additional course as well.

2. Provide on-going faculty development and support.

The LC office could use this report to target on-going faculty development and support efforts. Areas that could be addressed include facilitating group work, interdisciplinary aspects of Learning Communities, GA-Professor collaboration, and how to support students transition to the university. The latter topic might address the need to make explicit some of the skills needed to be a successful student, the challenges many Temple students face, and the institution's responsibility for fostering student success.

D. Institutional Interrelationships

As administrative support of the LCs program becomes less intensive, it seems especially important to build a strong and active constituency for the program. The two recommendations below suggest ways to increase faculty and administration involvement and investment in the program, thus likely also supporting on-going program growth and development.

1. Develop ways for faculty to network about teaching in LCs, e.g. sharing of ideas and experiences.

Building a faculty network around Learning Communities could strengthen and support both faculty's work in the program and the program itself. Involving faculty in organizing and running groups and networks would likely increase their appeal to other faculty. GAs should also be included in these efforts.

A newsletter for previous and current LC teachers would be one way to encourage participants to share successes, tips, questions, assignments, stories. Meetings of LC faculty (in person and via on-line conferences) for sharing and exchange could be structured around a variety of common interests – e.g. by school, types of course linkages (e.g. courses linked with math or with writing and those who teach the math or writing), interest in developing group work.

2. Build on breadth of support for LCs throughout administrative structures by

finding ways to share more of the texture and the benefits of what happens in LCs. Find ways to increase administrators' involvement with the program.

The current organizational structure (i.e. with an LC office providing coordination and professional development) has effectively supported the LC program. Administrators and faculty reported that the services and coordination offered by the office were helpful.

The LC program should find ways to build on the already strong support for LC programs that exists among Temple administrators. Since some administrators know little about what actually happens in LC classes, the LC program could experiment with ways to communicate what happens in LC classes. While a faculty newsletter (see above) might help in this effort, the program could also convene panels, e.g. of students and/or teachers to talk about their LC experience and/or could publish such accounts in other outlets.

As the Pew Grant which funded the initial development of the program ends, Temple needs to consider how the process of institutionalizing Learning Communities can continue and build. Many administrators see LCs as supporting their work and the goals of their office; the LC could seek ways to involve such people in “giving back” to the program. What creative linkages could be developed between LC and other administrative entities that would support Learning Communities and the teachers and professors involved in it?

APPENDIX A

ARTS & SCIENCES

<i>LINKED COURSES STUDIED</i>	<i>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</i>	<i>FACULTY</i>	<i>SALIENT FEATURES</i>
Psychology	350	4 professors; each of whom teaches about her/his discipline for 3 weeks	These professors were not involved in the Learning Community
Psychology Recitations	26 and 17	2 GAs: Mr. Sliwinski Ms. Hutchins ¹	2 psych sections linked to math class; others were linked to writing courses
Math Class	43	Professor Koller 3 GAs including Mr. Simmons	The professor and the 3 GAs involved in the course were all part of the LC. GAs in both courses spent much of their time with students preparing for and/or administering exams. There was a joint psychology/math assignment, graded by the professor and the psych GAs. Professor and GAs from both classes participated in weekly coffee hour which students could attend to ask questions or to socialize.

¹ LC faculty who were interviewed and/or observed in the research are identified with pseudonyms.

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

<i>LINKED COURSES STUDIED</i>	<i>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</i>	<i>FACULTY</i>	<i>SALIENT FEATURES</i>
Law & Society	260	Professor Lattimer GA: Ms. Oscar	Only school with mandatory Learning Communities. All SBM freshmen attend this large lecture connected to a writing course and a Freshmen Seminar.
ELECT (Writing)	13	Dean's appointment (Full-time appointed position) Ms. Newman	Course had law and society focus
Freshmen Seminar	13 (same group as above)	Business School Advisor Ms. Thomas	Only school with Freshmen Seminar linked to LC. Teachers communicated (primarily through advisor) about students not attending or not doing well and both teachers and advisors followed up.

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS & THEATER

LINKED COURSES STUDIED	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	FACULTY	SALIENT FEATURES
Introduction to Major	44	Professor Rayna	This class had an extensive group project demanding work outside of class as well as other group work during class time
Comp	2 sections of 22	GA: Mr. Marks	Same GA taught both sections Both teachers made references to themes or concepts from other class.

APPENDIX B

Demographics of Students Interviewed (Individually & in Focus Groups)

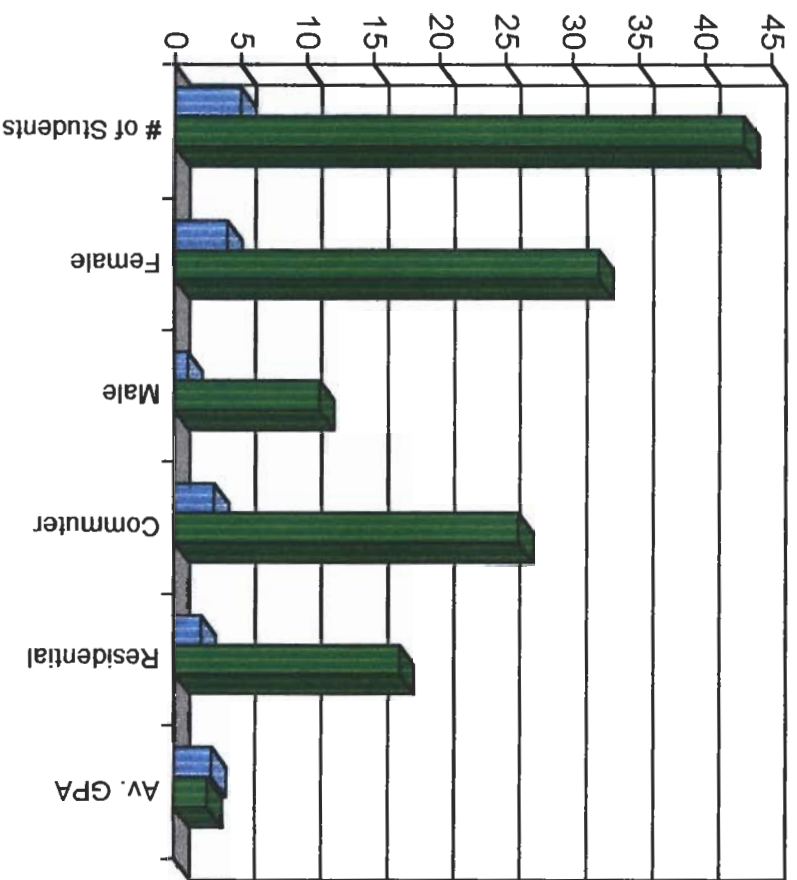
Learning Community		Gender		Race			Residential/Commuter		GPA in Learning Community					
SBM	SCAT	CAS	M	F	White	Afr-Am	Other	Residential	Commuter	A	B	C	D	Withdrawn from LC course
2	10 ⁱ	5	2	15	6	7	4	11	6	4	9	3	0	1 ⁱⁱ

ⁱ This number is higher than the numbers for the other communities because more SCAT students responded to focus group invitations.

ⁱⁱ This student withdrew from one of her learning community courses and received a C in the other.

Appendix C: Comparative Demographics: Students Interviewed and their Learning Communities

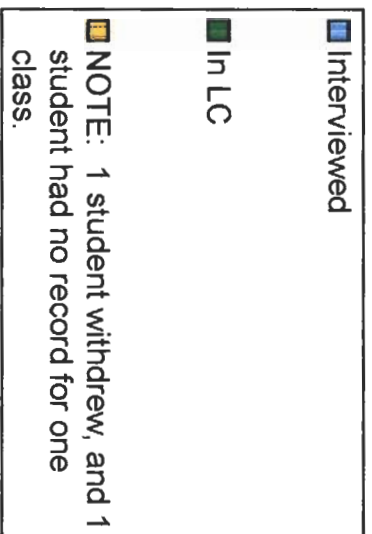
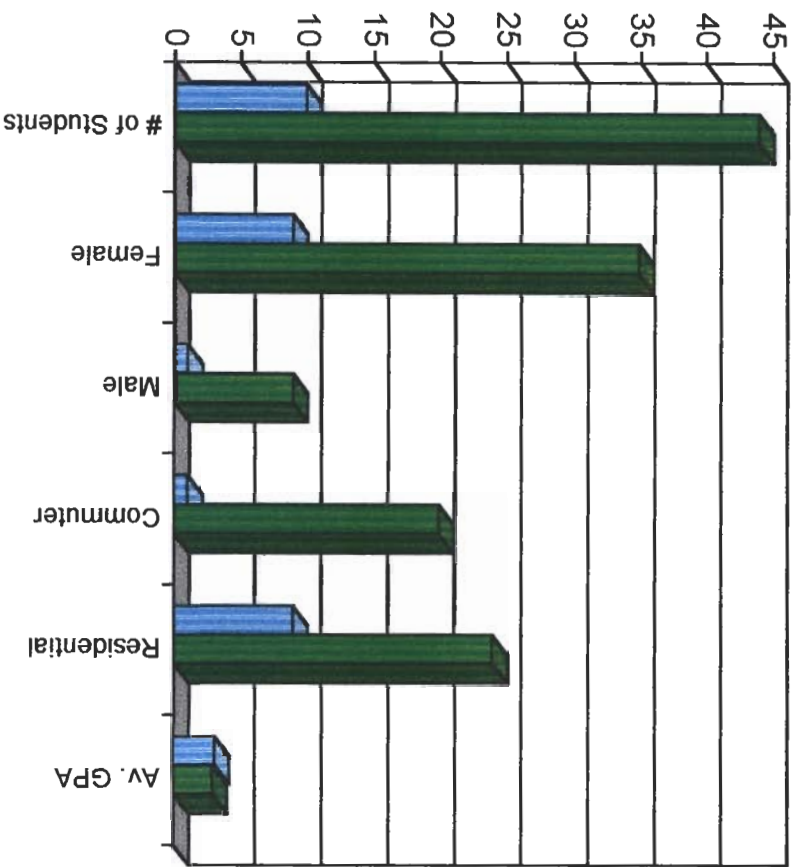
Learning Community in the College of Arts & Sciences



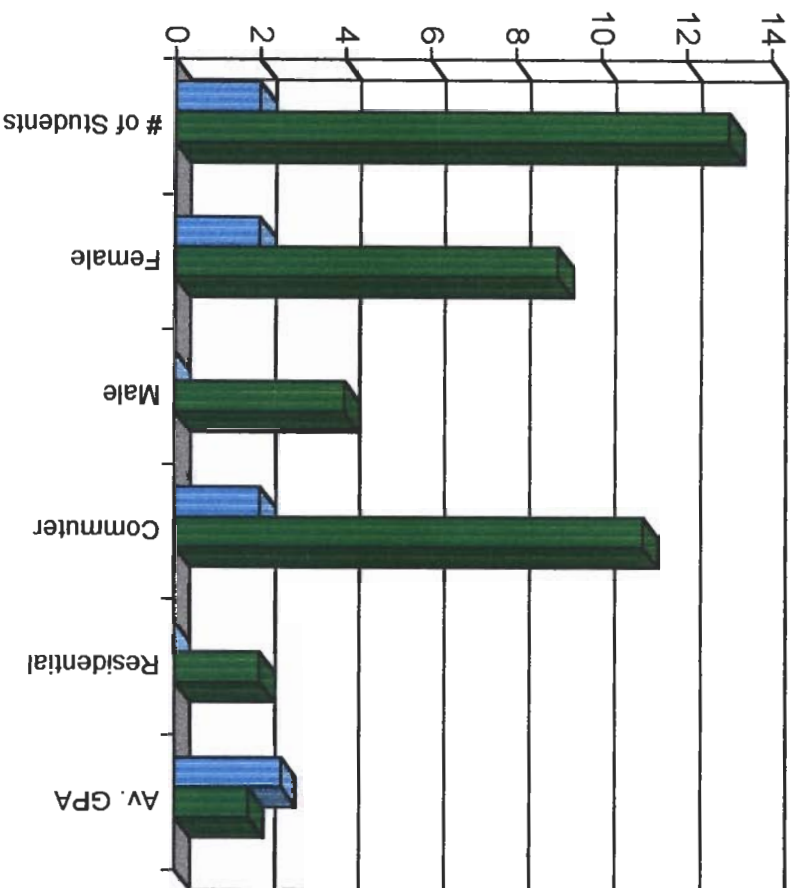
■ Interviewed
■ In LC

■ **NOTE:** There were no records for 3 students. 4 students received an incomplete in one class, and 2 students withdrew from one class.

Learning Community in the School of Communication & Theater



Learning Community in the School of Business & Management



■ Interviewed
■ In LC
NOTE: 1 student withdrew, and 1 student withdrew from one class.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION GUIDES

Temple Learning Community Guide
Classroom Observations

Are students interacting with each other or the teacher before and after class? How?

How is the classroom set up? Where do students and teacher position themselves? (draw chart)

What is the format (e.g. lecture, discussion, Socratic questioning, etc.)?

What is the subject/content of that day's class?

What kinds of opportunities are there for student comments/participation?

Teacher: Affect? Physical position and movement?
 What kinds of questions does s/he ask? (e.g. open-ended, yes/no)
 How does s/he respond to student comments?

Students: How are they participating?
 What kinds of questions do they ask? Who answers them?
 Who is talking? (gender, race)
 What are the interruption patterns?
 What is the students' affect (e.g. attentive, disengaged, chatting)

(How) Do students interact with each other during class?

TLC Interview Guide
Pre- and Post-Observation Questions for Teacher(s)

Pre-Observation

What are your plans for today's class?

How does this connect to the overall focus of the course?

What do you hope students will gain?

What makes this a Learning Community class?

Post-Observation

Did the class go as you expected?

Were there any surprises?

Was this a typical class?

TLC Guide Shadowing a Student

What is the physical appearance and overall atmosphere of the various settings you visit with the student?

What does the student look like?

How and with whom does the student interact? Entering and leaving classes, during classes, during meals, walking across campus, etc.

What are the content and pedagogy of the student's classes (Learning Community and non-Learning Community)? How is the student responding during the class?

How does the student spend time between or after classes?

(In write-up also describe how student was selected)

**TLC Guide
Student Interview**

Tell me about how you chose Temple.

Did you know any other Temple students before you started classes? Describe these connections.

(If this has not already been answered): Do you commute or live on campus? How do you like this arrangement?

What classes are you taking?

What made you choose to participate in your Learning Community?

Why do you think they call this a Learning Community? [What kind of connection is there between the two (or three) classes that make up your Learning Community?]

How would you compare your Learning Community and non Learning Community classes? (Do they see them as different, e.g. in terms of teaching style, assignments, extra-curricular activities, relationships with professors or classmates?)

Where do you study for your classes? With whom? How? (Probe for any differences between studying for Learning Community and other classes)

Where do you spend time when you're on campus? Where do you eat? With whom? Who do you socialize with? Have Learning Community classmates become part of the group you hang out with at Temple?

How do you think students could learn more about Learning Communities (e.g. for better placement, more participation)?

Are there ways you think the Learning Communities could work better? Describe.

TLC
Student Focus Group Interview Guide

How would you describe LCs to a friend starting Temple this fall? (Do round. Students read all or part of what they wrote on survey)

Describe how you got involved in an LC?

Looking back, how were your LC classes different from non-LC ones?

Prompt: How were the classes of your LC connected?

How did participating in a LC help you feel part of a community at Temple?

Prompt: What do they mean by community?

Are there things you miss/don't miss about LCs?

How did you get to know the LC faculty differently than teachers of non LC classes?

(importance of group work to LCs) What was your best experience with group work at Temple? (Participants can read what they wrote and then comment)

How is this semester compared to your first one at Temple?

Prompt: Academically? Socially?

Prompt: for other connections maintained to LC students, profs.

Are you in a LC this semester? What's that like?

Do you know anybody who dropped out after first semester? What happened? Were they in a LC?

How would you change or improve LCs?

Commuters: What is it like to be a commuter student at Temple?

Prompt: Advantages and disadvantages? How do you think your educational experience would be different if you lived on campus?

Residents: What are advantages and disadvantages of living on campus?

How do you think your educational experience would be different if you commuted?

If time: Who participated in FS? Was it connected to the LC? What did the FS do for you?

Survey for Focus Group Participants

Name _____

Date _____

For each statement below, circle one of the numbers to show whether you disagree strongly, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat or agree strongly with the statement.

1	2	3	4
Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree Strongly

I feel part of the Temple community.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

LC (Learning Community) Teachers care about how their students are doing.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

LC classes don't seem that different from other classes at Temple.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

If you think LC classes are different, list some ways they are different:

I knew students in my LC classes better than the people in my other classes.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

The people that I hang out with on campus are mostly not from my LC.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

I prefer to study alone.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Last semester, I studied with people from my LC at least three times.

Circle one: YES NO

Please write out answers to these questions:

1. How would you describe LCs to a friend starting Temple this fall?

2. What was your best experience with group work at Temple? Describe it and what class it was in. What made it work?

3. List any extra-curricular activities you participate in at Temple (for example: community service, fraternities, sports, newspaper). Indicate which, if any, you learned about through a Freshman Seminar.

Temple Learning Communities Interview Guide - Professors

Background

How did you get involved in teaching a Learning Community class?

What kind of faculty development or training did you receive?

What do you see as the goals of Learning Communities? How effectively are those goals realized?

What's your perception of how students get involved in Learning Communities?

Did you recommend a student(s) for shadowing last semester? How did you choose these students? Tell us more about your perceptions of the student from your class that we shadowed.

Generally, do you see any differences in participation, academic achievement, retention among residential and non-residential students? (any difference for Learning Communities)

Learning Community vs. Non learning Community Classes

Do you teach Learning Community classes/sections differently than courses that aren't linked as part of a Learning Community?

How was the academic achievement of your Learning Community last semester? Have you noticed a difference, academically, between Learning Community classes and non-LC classes?

How would you describe the ways Learning Community students related to each other in last semester's class? To you? In general, are student-student or student-professor interactions and relationships different in Learning Community courses you have taught?

Temple is a very diverse school. How have you seen issues of diversity and difference play out in Learning Community classes? (e.g. student-student interaction, classroom discussions) Is this different from what you see in non Learning Community classes?

Have you taught in the Freshman Seminar Program? What was your experience with that?

Group Work/Activities

Did you use small groups in your Learning Community class? If so, how did you set them up (pick small groups, tasks, instructions, time allotted/frequency)? How did the small groups work? Did they change over time? Were there group projects; what happened? How was group work evaluated?

Did you plan any in or out of class social activities for your LC class? What were they? How did they go?

Interdisciplinary

What kind of contact did you have with the professor of the course linked to yours?

Did teaching a Learning Community course encourage you to think in a more interdisciplinary way? How?

Were there any interdisciplinary assignments or activities? Please describe.

GAs and Profs (Choose questions depending on whether respondent is GA or professor and on whether GA and prof are linked as co-teachers of linked courses or as prof and recitation leader)

Profs: Do you work differently with GAs in a Learning Community class? OR How does the fact that a GA teaches the course linked to yours affect the possibilities for reaching Learning Community goals (such as making classes more interdisciplinary)?

GAs: Describe your working relationship with a) the professor who teaches the linked class and/or b) the professor for whom you GA a section?

Did you experience any conflict between your role as a GA and the goals of a Learning Community course?

Has working as a GA in a Learning Community course affected your perspective on teaching or your career goals in any way?

Future of Learning Communities

What barriers have you experienced to implementing Learning Communities in the way you'd envisioned?

How could Learning Communities be improved? (structure, pedagogy, class size, interdisciplinary connections)

Temple Learning Communities Interview Guide - Administrators

What's your connection to the Learning Communities program?

What do you see as the goals of Learning Communities? How effectively do you think those goals are realized?

For School Heads: What kinds of Learning Communities do you have in your school? What sense do you have of their effect on professors? Students? The school?

How do you think Learning Community classes differ from non Learning Community ones? (e.g. Pedagogy, critical thinking, student involvement, student retention,)

Do you think Learning Community classes affect students' academic achievement? How?

Do you think Learning Communities should be required or voluntary? (note: are required in business school and voluntary elsewhere we did research)

Many LC classes are taught by GAs. How do you see their role in the program?

How do freshmen get into Learning Communities? What's your sense of who (chooses to) take them and who doesn't?

If this administrator works with entering students (as advisor etc.): What kinds of interactions do you have with students regarding Learning Communities?

How do professors get involved in teaching a Learning Communities class? Is there an orientation process?

In general, do you see any differences in participation, academic achievement, retention among residential and non-residential students? (any difference for these types of students in Learning Communities)

Temple is a very diverse school. How have you seen issues of diversity and difference play out in general? In Learning Community classes? (student-student interaction, classroom discussions)

Freshmen Seminars

What is the purpose of Freshmen Seminars? How often are they linked with Learning Communities? Do they look different when they are and aren't linked?

Who teaches Freshmen Seminars? What is the curriculum?

Future of Learning Communities

What institutional barriers do you think there are for Learning Communities?

How could Learning Communities be improved? (structure, pedagogy, class size, interdisciplinary connections)

What role would you like to see Learning Communities play in Temple overall / your school?

Appendix E REFERENCES

Eight classroom observations

November 5 (2); November 7 (1); November 8 (1); November 14 (2);
November 21 (1); November 22 (1).

Six student shadowings and interviews

November 11; November 26; December 3 (2); December 6 (2).

Three student focus groups

March 31 (2 students); April 22 (6 students); April 24 (3 students).

Nine faculty interviews

February 27 (2); March 18 (2); March 19 (1); March 21 (1); April 22 (1);
May 21 (1); May 23 (1).

Twenty-one administrator interviews

March 25 (2); May 6 (5); May 7 (2); May 14 (2); May 21 (7); June 23 (2);
July 23 (1).

Levine, Jodi H. and Daniel P. Tompkins. *Making Learning Communities Work: Seven Lessons from Temple University*. AAHE Bulletin. June 1996 Volume 48, Number 10.

Learning Communities Course Guide. Fall 1996. Temple University.