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Editorial

Sara Huntington

The Evergreen State College, huntings@evergreen.edu

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Editorial

Abstract

Our contributors continue to demonstrate how learning communities, in their multiple variations, constitute a substantive intervention into the classroom, challenging students to engage more deeply and effectively in their learning. What emerges in this collection of articles is the strong sense that people who teach in learning communities understand that setting the stage for deep and transformative learning requires skillfully connecting how students learn with what they are learning. The articles in this issue demonstrate how learning community faculty make good use of the freedom afforded by various curricular structures to create rich learning opportunities for students. What's more, teachers in learning communities grasp the value of approaching the classroom as master learners, whose responsibilities can sometimes extend to sharing their work in this journal.

Welcome to the Fall 2017 Issue.

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The practices highlighted in this issue have taken form in a variety of institutional settings, illustrating how contextually sensitive learning community practices can become. In "A Place-based Learning Community: Klamath Connection at Humboldt State University," Matt Johnson, Amy Spowles, Katlin Overeem, and Angela Rich (Humboldt State University) describe how they have integrated place-based learning into learning communities in order to improve students' engagement and learning in STEM. In designing this program, they have taken advantage of their strategic location, which is geographically and culturally unfamiliar to the majority of their students but rich in material for cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural teaching and learning. In another practice piece, "The Roadmap Seminar: Preparing Students for Success in Learning Communities," Jeffrey F. Thomas and Sarah Fatherly (Queens University of Charlotte) describe a transition course that introduces students to the three skills central to their learning communities: integrative thinking, teamwork, and metacognition. The course evolved from their comprehensive efforts to change their general education curriculum; the transition course is essentially an on-ramp or bridge into their larger learning community courses.

If the "Roadmap Seminar" provides an on-ramp, another practice piece constitutes a throughway. In "Supporting Sophomore Success through a New Learning Community Model," Emily Virtue (Clemson University), Gale Well (Western Carolina University), and Andrew D. Virtue (Western Carolina University) document the difficulties that students experience in their sophomore year—the "sophomore slump" -- when they have yet to become fully engaged in the college community. Even though the sophomore learning community presents logistical challenges with scheduling and staffing, it provides an essential function by supporting and guiding students through this uncertain time, as they identify their academic niche and discover the joys of more advanced work.

The research reported in the issue focuses on an innovative integration of high impact practices—a curriculum on civic engagement embedded into a learning community. In "Not only as Students, but as Citizens': Integrative Learning and Civic Research in a First-Year Learning Community Course," Nate Mickelson and Molly Makris (CUNY Guttman Community College) argue for the potential of LCs to foster civic engagement. They describe challenges they faced and the strategies they developed to embed civic engagement into a first-year learning community. The outcomes they document demonstrate how skillful LC faculty can craft a foundational design for learning communities that simultaneously promotes the values of engagement and civic awareness. The strategic fit between form and content described in this

article, as well as the other articles in this issue, should inform and enrich the ways in which we continue to conceptualize—and design—the substance of teaching and learning.

In our perspective piece, “Mentoring: A natural role for learning community faculty,” Sarah L. Hessenauer and Kristi Law (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater) reflect on the benefits of mentoring in learning communities. Their article explores the many dimensions of mentoring and the challenges of formalizing aspects of these relationships in a university setting.

Thank you to our readership. Please let us know if you’re interested in contributing. We can start working with you even in the developmental stages of your writing.