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Why a Journal? Why Now?

Washington Center Editorial Team
washcenter@evergreen.edu

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Why a Journal? Why Now?

Abstract

In recent decades learning communities have grown from an isolated practice on some campuses to a professional field spanning diverse communities of practice. A professional journal provides a way to document our collective learning.

Why is there so much interest in learning communities? I think the reasons can be divided into three broad categories: *philosophical* (because learning communities fit into a changing philosophy of knowledge); *research based* (because learning communities fit with what the research tells us about learning); and *pragmatic* (because learning communities work).

~ K. Patricia Cross, “Why Learning Communities? Why Now?” *About Campus*, July-August 1998.

Why a journal? Why now?

Learning communities have always been characterized as a practitioner-driven reform effort. Much of what we know about learning communities we learn through experience, our own and our colleagues’. The National Learning Communities Conference, regionally-based meetings and curriculum planning retreats, sessions at other academic conferences, and campus-based professional development events enhance our opportunities to learn from each other. But much of this learning is ephemeral—we lose our notes, or the email follow-up gets buried in an ever-expanding inbox. Without a widely circulated professional journal, we don’t have a collective way to document our learning.

We hope this journal fills that void. We know faculty, staff, administrators, researchers, and students have a lot to say about learning communities. By making *Learning Communities Research and Practice (LCRP)* an open access e-journal, easily accessible online, we expand the journal’s base of potential readers. By making it peer-reviewed, we insure that published articles meet collaboratively agreed-upon standards for research and writing in our field.

A learning community journal should not only be widely accessible and peer-reviewed; it also needs to include articles on both research and practice. What began as a faculty experiment in classrooms over forty years ago has become an interdisciplinary approach to reforming learning and teaching across institutions. Classroom practices have led to communities of practice, and professional networks have become a professional field. Learning community practice has been enriched by student affairs scholarship, disciplinary expertise, and progressive trends in education from critical pedagogy and math reform to movements for educational equity and the scholarship of teaching and learning. This cross-fertilization accounts for our field’s generative, grass-roots energy; it also underscores the diverse communities of practice whose influence has kept the field learner- and learning-centered. The journal’s combination of research

articles, practices from the field, perspectives, and reviews is intended to reflect the varied ways we think and write about our learning community work.

Within our field's rich diversity, we find many different kinds of learning communities; they serve a wide range of students with complex needs and aspirations, and span everything from pre-college to graduate programs. In this array of learning communities, we also find a shared benchmark for what constitutes a "learning community." For several decades, practitioners have agreed that learning communities include three defining features: a common cohort of students taking two or more classes together; a robust, collaborative partnership between student affairs and academic affairs; and explicitly designed integrative learning experiences for students. This journal follows that tradition.

We hope *LCRP* will become the central journal for our field. We invite submissions that address questions and issues related to all aspects of learning community practice. The approaches and methods that lend themselves to pursuing these wide-ranging questions and issues will vary, given that learning community practice is guided by many disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. We welcome this diversity. To strengthen the connection between practice and publishing, we have built into the submission process a way for authors to receive formative feedback from the editors prior to sending submissions through the formal peer review process.

This January 2013 issue of *LCRP* departs from what will be a May-November publishing schedule. It also is special in another respect: the articles have been selected from past issues of the now defunct *Journal of Learning Communities Research* (2006-2010), a collaborative project started by Kennesaw State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. We thought this compilation would be a fitting way to make some of the early learning community scholarship more accessible and to honor the work of the journal's co-editors: Rebecca Casey, Barbara Jackson, Keisha Hoerrner, and Frank Ross.

In our field, we appreciate that practice often takes precedence over writing about practice. Still, we sense a growing consensus. We need to *write* about our work. We intend for this journal to provide a credible venue for spirited exchanges about research and practice—if *you* send us your submissions! We look forward to the May 2013 issue of *LCRP*.